

Humankind and the Cosmos

Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae

TEXTS AND STUDIES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN LIFE AND LANGUAGE

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Humankind and the Cosmos

Early Christian Representations

By

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To Otilia



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- 1 This publication has been implemented within the framework of the Project Science & Orthodoxy around the World, which was made possible through the support of a grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation, Inc. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Project sow and the Templeton World Charity Foundation, Inc.
 - 2 Recently, Andrew Louth indirectly confirmed the suitability of this approach. In short, he pointed out that, contrary to popular belief, matters of science and religion have long been debated, including in the early Christian centuries. See Andrew Louth, “Basil and the Greek Fathers on Creation in the *Hexaemeron*,” in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and the Modern Sciences*, ed. John P. Slattery (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 67–79, esp. 67.

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3 "A Note on Evagrius' Cosmological and Metaphysical Statements," *JTS* ns 71:2 (2020) DOI 10.1093/jts/flaa143. "A Theology of the World: Dumitru Stăniloae, the Traditional Worldview, and Contemporary Cosmology," in *Orthodox Christianity and Modern Science: Tensions, Ambiguities, Potential*, ed. Vasilios N. Makrides and Gayle Woloschak, soc 1 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2019), 205–222. "The King, the Palace, and the Kingdom: Anthropocentric Thinking in Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and Other Witnesses," in *John Chrysostom: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Doru Costache and Mario Baghos (Sydney: AIOCS Press, 2017), 235–265. "Worldview and Melodic Imagery in Clement the Alexandrian, St Athanasius, and Their Antecedents in Saints Ignatius and Irenaeus," *Phronema* 29:1 (2014): 21–60. "Meaningful Cosmos: Logos and Nature in Clement the Alexandrian's *Exhortation to the Gentiles*," *Phronema* 28:2 (2013): 107–130. "Christian Worldview: Understandings from St Basil the Great," in *Cappadocian Legacy: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Doru Costache and Philip Kariatlis (Sydney: St Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2013), 97–126. "Making Sense of the World: Theology and Science in St Gregory of Nyssa's *An Apology for the Hexaemeron*," *Phronema* 28:1 (2013): 1–29. "Approaching *An Apology for the Hexaemeron*: Its Aims, Method and Discourse," *Phronema* 27:2 (2012): 53–81. "Christianity and the World in the *Letter to Diognetus*: Inferences for Contemporary Ecclesial Experience," *Phronema* 27:1 (2012): 29–50. "Apologetic, moral și mistic: Trei moduri ale viziunii ecclesiale asupra creației," in *Noua Reprezentare a Lumii: Studii Interdisciplinare*, vol. 1, ed. Magda Stavinschi et al. (București: XXI Eonul dogmatic, 2002), 38–59.

what is good about the legibility of the text in its present form is due to their painstaking efforts. All the remaining weaknesses belong exclusively to me.

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Doru Costache

Sydney's Northern Beaches

25 July 2020

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Abbreviations

Ancient and Medieval Works

<i>Address</i>	Basil of Caesarea, <i>Address to Youth</i>
<i>Apology</i>	Gregory of Nyssa, <i>An Apology for the Hexaemeron</i>
<i>Chapters</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>Gnostic Chapters</i>
<i>Columba</i>	Adomnán of Iona, <i>Life of St Columba</i>
<i>Commentary</i>	Origen, <i>Commentary on Genesis</i>
<i>Constitution</i>	Gregory of Nyssa, <i>On the Constitution of the Human Being</i>
<i>Creation</i>	Philo, <i>On the Creation</i>
<i>Diognetus</i>	Anon., <i>Letter to Diognetus</i>
<i>Ephesians</i>	Ignatius of Antioch, <i>Letter to the Ephesians</i>
<i>Exhortation</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Exhortation to the Gentiles</i>
<i>Genesis</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on Genesis</i>
<i>Gentiles</i>	Athanasius of Alexandria, <i>Against the Gentiles</i>
<i>Gnostic</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>The Gnostic</i>
<i>Heresies</i>	Irenaeus of Lyon, <i>Against the Heresies</i>
<i>Hexaemeron</i>	Basil of Caesarea, <i>Homilies on the Hexaemeron</i>
<i>Homily</i>	Origen, <i>The First Homily on Genesis</i>
<i>Incarnation</i>	Athanasius of Alexandria, <i>On the Incarnation</i>
<i>Letter</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>The Great Letter</i>
<i>Life</i>	Athanasius of Alexandria, <i>Life of Antony</i>
<i>Monasteries</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>To Monks in Monasteries and Communities</i>
<i>Monk</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>The Monk</i>
<i>On John</i>	Origen, <i>Commentary on John</i>
<i>Prayer</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>On Prayer</i>
<i>Principles</i>	Origen, <i>On First Principles</i>
<i>Questions</i>	Theodoret of Cyrus, <i>Questions on Genesis</i>
<i>Selections</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Prophetic selections</i>
<i>Song</i>	Origen of Alexandria, <i>Commentary on the Song of Songs</i>
<i>Spirit</i>	Basil of Caesarea, <i>On the Holy Spirit</i>
<i>Thoughts</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>On Thoughts</i>

Scriptural Sources

Old Testament LXX

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Ps	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Isa	Isaiah
Dan	Daniel
Macc	Maccabees
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Romans
1–2 Cor	Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1 Tim	1 Timothy
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
2 Pet	2 Peter
Rev	Revelation

Modern Sources

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AHS	<i>Australian Historical Studies</i>
AIOCS	The Australian Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies
ANCTRTBS	Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies
ANHS	A New History of the Sermon
ASPTLA	Ashgate Studies in Philosophy & Theology in Late Antiquity

AV	Analekta Vlatadon
BAC	The Bible in Ancient Christianity
BETT	Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations
BCP	Blackwell Companions to Philosophy
<i>BDGN</i>	<i>The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHP	Bibliothèque d'Histoire de la Philosophie
<i>BI</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BLE</i>	<i>Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique</i>
BSCH	Brill's Series in Church History
BSGRT	Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
BEHESR	Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études: Sciences religieuses
CA	Christianisme antique
CC	Cascade Companions
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Coptic Church Review</i>
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca
CEA	Collection des Études Augustiniennes
CGLC	Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics
CGT	Contemporary Greek Theologians
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
CHECL	Classics in the History of Early Christian Literature
CLC	Cambridge Library Collection
CMC	Cambridge Medieval Classics
CS	Cistercian Studies
CSS	Collected Studies Series
CTC	Christian Theology in Context
<i>CTSAP</i>	<i>Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings</i>
CWHL	The California World History Library
DOML	Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>DV</i>	<i>Doctor Virtualis: Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale</i>
EASA	Collection des Études Augustiniennes: Série Antiquité
EIMBOR	Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române
ECCA	Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity
ECF	The Early Church Fathers
ECS	Early Christian Studies
EPROER	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
<i>ER</i>	<i>The Ecumenical Review</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
FC	The Fathers of the Church

FN	Fundamentis Novis
FTECS	Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality
GC	Le génie du christianisme
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller
GECS	Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies
GEIPT	Groundworks—Ecological Issues in Philosophy and Theology
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
GRLH	Garland reference library of the humanities
HBI	History of Biblical Interpretation
Herm	Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
HJ	<i>The Heythrop Journal</i>
HTB	Histoire du texte biblique
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICA	Initiations au christianisme ancien
IJST	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
ITS	Innsbrucker theologische Studien
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEBS	<i>Journal of European Baptist Studies</i>
J ECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JL	Jerome Lectures
JLA	<i>Journal of Late Antiquity</i>
J OCS	<i>Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRT	<i>Journal of Reformed Theology</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JTECL	Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCC	The Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	The Library of Early Christianity
LTP	<i>Laval théologique et philosophique</i>
MH	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
MNRAS	<i>Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society</i>
MP	Monothéisme et philosophie
MS	Millennium Studies
MT	Mapping the Tradition
MTh	<i>Modern Theology</i>
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OC	Oxford Classical Texts

OCT	Outstanding Christian Thinkers
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OPC	Oxford Philosophical Concepts
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
OTRM	Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs
OW	Origenes Werke
PhilAnt	Philosophia Antiqua
PACS	Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
PaS	Patristica Sorbonensia
PBR	<i>The Patristic and Byzantine Review</i>
PEID	Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue
PFE	Problemi di filosofia dell'esperienza
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)</i>
PhTh	<i>Philosophy and Theology</i>
PO/WPT	Pro Oriente/Wiener Patristische Tagungen
PRS	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Society</i>
PS	Patristic Studies
PSB	Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești
PSCC	Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RC	Routledge Classics
RCE	Ricerche di cultura europea / Forschungen zur europäischen Kultur
REA	<i>Revue des Études Augustiniennes</i>
REAP	<i>Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques</i>
RET	<i>Revue des Études Tardo-antiques</i>
RSAW	Routledge Sourcebooks for the Ancient World
RTAMS	Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale—Supplementa
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SC	Sources chrétiennes
ScrTh	<i>Scripta Theologica</i>
SEA	Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum
SERAPHIM	Studies in Education and Religion in Ancient and Pre-Modern History in the Mediterranean and Its Environs
SHERM	<i>Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry</i>
SM	<i>Scripta Mediaevalia</i>
SNT	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
SOC	Science and Orthodox Christianity
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
ST	<i>Studii Teologice</i>

STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
<i>StM</i>	<i>Studia Monastica</i>
<i>ss</i>	<i>Studies in Spirituality</i>
SVT	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>SVTQ</i>	<i>St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly</i>
TCH	The Transformation of the Classical Heritage
TLG	Thesaurus Linguae Graecae
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TSR</i>	<i>Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion</i>
TT	Textes et traditions
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
WGRW	Writings from the Greco-Roman World
WHCT	The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology
WP	World Perspectives
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

The World of the Early Christians

If we cannot change the world, at least let's look at it differently. I was still a teenager when I read this thought in Nikos Kazantzakis' astonishing book, *Report to Greco*. It might not run quite like this—hence the absence of quotation marks—but this is how I remember it. If memory serves me right, he was paraphrasing a Byzantine mystic, without giving a name. At the time I was convinced that this aphorism enshrined a lamentable failure. Of course the world had to be changed! Later in my life, however, I came to understand that to consider things differently does make a change—within oneself—and that it is this change that matters. However, as I undertook lengthy patristic explorations, I realised that to look at the world differently is in fact to change it. The philosophical ramifications of quantum physics seemed to confirm this conclusion. I still believe it. But what matters is that all this has led me here, to present this book about the early Christians and how they viewed the world, or how, in doing so, they changed it.

My personal journey aside, the idea of this book stems from my discovering how very little we know about the early Christian worldview and what it says about people's place within the universe. Scholars of early Christianity occasionally move beyond the customary ethical, historical, literary, philosophical, spiritual, and theological considerations into the broader spheres of geography, the history of ideas, the history of mentalities, material culture, pedagogy, and sociology.¹ But the interactions between the early Christians and the earth's environment remain largely uncharted. So does, too, the interdependence of their cosmology and their attitudes, ideas, and values. Even when the term “worldview” makes an appearance, its cosmic and cosmological connotations are lost.

The factors which contribute to our relative ignorance have to do with ingrained dichotomies, reductionism, compartmentalisation, and overspecial-

1 A series of important contributions illustrate this broader trend. *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *Origins to Constantine*, ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge University Press, 2006). *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2004). *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, ed. Ken Parry (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

isation. These find support in modern binaries such as the dissociation of history and the cosmos, culture and nature, viewer and viewed, or subject and object.² It is these assumptions which induce scholars to consider the early Christian experience outside the natural world. In reductionist fashion, most scholarly treatments replace nature by culture, and the cosmos by history. This widespread approach does not differ from current talks on economy, notoriously oblivious of environmental concerns. Talks on economy and academic historicism also betray the modern trend towards overspecialisation, which deploys reductionism as a touchstone of cultural analysis. And overspecialisation, to borrow from Isaac Asimov, “cuts knowledge at a million points and leaves it bleeding.”³ No wonder we know so much about the early Christian world, by which we mean a built environment,⁴ and so little about the natural world of the early Christians—how they represented God’s creation, the earth’s environment, humankind’s abode. We keep confusing *urbs* and *orbs* or, as Asimov states, the empire and the universe.⁵ To distinguish these items is pivotal to my argument. In Chapter Seven I shall talk about “ecology and empire” against the backdrop of contemporary environmental history.

1 Methodological Prolegomena

In this book I propose to demonstrate that early Christians did not primarily construe themselves as inhabitants of built environments; at least, not as much as modern people do. As traditional people, they did not live in history only, they lived within a cosmos.⁶ They inhabited this earth, this world. Their universe was a divinely created home for human beings made in God’s image. All

2 Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1–72. Louth’s analysis of these early modern phenomena and trends, and how they impact the humanities, is still very useful.

3 Isaac Asimov, *Prelude to Foundation* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1996), 93.

4 See *The Early Christian World*, second edn, ed. Philip F. Esler (London and New York: Routledge, 2017; first edn, in two volumes, 2000). Typically, there is no room within this important work for the natural world as the early Christians represented it. The note of built environment is apparent in Laura Nasrallah’s chapter, “Material Culture and Historical Analysis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Benjamin H. Dunning (Oxford University Press, 2019), 59–75.

5 Asimov, *Prelude*, 65.

6 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1959), 17, 62.

their attitudes to life, culture, and the values derived from this foundational experience, their being-in-the-world.⁷ I therefore agree with Frances Young's point that "a particular understanding of the world and humanity as God's creatures validates and undergirds the explicit, predominantly ethical, teaching."⁸ Ethics derives from people's experience in the cosmos and does not exhaust it. In order to understand the attitudes, values, and aspirations of the early Christians, we must discover how they viewed the world. We must, in other words, understand their cosmology and—as we shall see throughout this book—their manner of natural contemplation. A merely historicist approach fails to do justice to their experience; so do, too, any other forms of reductionism. And since reductionist approaches do not support a rounder assessment of this experience, I shall be drawing upon a broad disciplinary pool, and a wider range of concepts. To these approaches and concepts I must now turn, leaving the nuancing of topics to the seven chapter introductions.

My method encompasses three distinct layers.

First, given that I work with writings of late antiquity, I follow the standard approach in biblical, early Christian, and patristic studies, combining historical, literary, philosophical, and theological tools. Depending on their particulars and my own focus, I discuss these writings and their context, antecedents, authorial aims, genre, literary tropes, and the theological, the philosophical, and the cultural underpinnings of their discourse. I also engage the relevant scholarship—old and new—showing how my approach confirms or diverges from received views. Only in the light of such preparatory work do I address the Christian worldview, particularly the matter of dwelling in the world. I exemplify most topics by relevant quotations, which overall I examine thoroughly. Textual analysis consists in explanation, interpretation, or both; it is exegetical as well as hermeneutical. Where needed, I provide keywords and relevant phrases in the classical languages. I must point out that, unless otherwise stated, all translations from the classical languages are mine.⁹ These translations are integral to my argument. Sometimes, indeed, my solutions dif-

7 Frances Young, "Christian Teaching," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 91–104, esp. 100.

8 Young, "Christian Teaching," 99. See also Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

9 The critical editions used throughout this book are indicated only in the bibliographical list. Where available, the *PG* references follow the *TLG* version, therefore including line numbers. But overall I use the latest critical editions of patristic texts. As with the classical languages, unless otherwise stated all translations from modern languages belong to me.

fer significantly from the existing renditions. As certain existing translations implicitly convey modern assumptions—such as those I listed earlier—the need to replace them is obvious.

Second, for the purposes of understanding the passages I analyse—whether cosmological in scope or otherwise—and considering their particulars, I shall adopt methods from a variety of fields. Recently, this approach came to be dubbed the socio-historical method.¹⁰ Accordingly, often I call on apocalyptic studies, studies in asceticism, church history, cultural studies, environmental studies, the history of ideas, the history of music, the history of philosophy, the history of science, the philosophy of science, religious studies, and science and theology. If we are to grasp the complexities pertaining to the early Christian texts, this multifocal lens is *sine qua non*. This approach is not especially original, since contemporary scholars already draw on the history of the medical sciences and cognitive sciences, for example, to study aspects of the early Christian experience.¹¹ Original, however, is my deployment of this interdisciplinary lens for the study of the world, including recourse to scientific cosmology. Contemporary cosmology is particularly useful as it helps us to overcome the anthropocentrism and the historicism of the past several centuries, allowing us to see the world with eyes that resemble those of late ancient people. The introduction to each chapter will clarify what disciplinary approaches I apply therein, and how.

Third, and drawing upon the above, in order to arrive at a comprehensive view of the relevant topics I utilise a range of contemporary concepts, borrowed from several fields of study—notably, anthropic cosmology, Big History, environmental history, synergy, and theory of everything. These concepts represent integrative frameworks which consider reality beyond the disciplinary divides. For example, anthropic cosmology, also known as the anthropic principle, bridges two sciences which continue to walk their separate ways since the dawn of modernity: cosmology and anthropology.¹² This vantage point is wholly at odds with modern historicism and other reductionist assumptions, but matches perfectly the encompassing parameters of the early Christian

10 See Darren M. Slade, “What is the Socio-Historical Method in the Study of Religion?” *SHERM* 2:1 (2020): 1–15.

11 Examples of this approach would fall outside the scope of this book. Suffice it to mention here a study to which I shall return several times in what follows. See Bronwen Neil et al., *Dreams, Virtue and Divine Knowledge in Early Christian Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

12 The classical reference remains John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1986).

worldview, especially its cosmic dimension and sensitivity towards the earth. While historicism is patent in the statement “you are of no use to the stars,”¹³ the following scientific account points to the anthropic principle with great clarity:

Far from exposing human beings as incidental products of blind physical forces, science suggests that the existence of conscious organisms is a *fundamental* feature of the universe. We have been written into the laws of nature in a deep and, I believe, meaningful way.¹⁴

Throughout this book, anthropic cosmology means that human and cosmic realities are mutually inclusive. I also refer to the anthropic principle when discussing the early Christians as active factors within the world. Chapters One and Seven explore this sense of the concept.

The introduction of environmental history serves the same goal.¹⁵ It alerts us to the need to consider together the development of civilisation and its impact upon the planetary ecosystem. This concept helps me account for the early Christian experience as ecologically anchored, an outcome due to the doctrine of creation. Accordingly, sometimes I compare the early Christian doctrine of creation to current concepts of theory of everything and Big History. Both signify the contemporary quest for coherence in the grasping of reality. The theory of everything—an ongoing challenge for hard scientists—seeks an algorithm capable of explaining the whole of cosmic reality together with its parts.¹⁶ What heralds this algorithm is the simplicity and the beauty of scientific theories, which “give a sense of how the whole of nature fits together into one grand picture.”¹⁷ In turn, Big History is a narrative which rewrites humankind’s story against the backdrop of cosmic evolution, the genesis of our planet, and the emergence of life on earth.¹⁸ I take both these concepts in a theological sense. I

13 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (Thorndike, ME: Harcourt Brace & Co, 2000), 93.

14 Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 21.

15 See *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, ed. Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997).

16 Davies, *The Mind of God*, 162–169. Stephen W. Hawking, *The Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe*, special anniversary edition (Beverly Hills, CA: Phoenix Books, 2005), 119–136.

17 Luke A. Barnes and Geraint F. Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary’s Handbook (Or: How to Beat the Big Bang)* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 13.

18 David Christian, *Origin Story: A Big History of Everything* (New York: Hachette, 2018). David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*, CWHL (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004). Fred Spier, *Big History and the Future of Humanity*

do so in order to hold together in a synoptic view God, humankind, and cosmos, or the cosmos as people's divinely given home. The early Christians believed in the weaving of all things together. As Asimov would have it, they believed that "nothing can happen anywhere without affecting everywhere."¹⁹ All this bears upon the principle of synergy, another conceptual mainstay of this book. Synergy, or cooperation, is the way contemporary thought frames the interaction between God, humankind, and the cosmos on all levels of reality.²⁰ We shall encounter this principle in Chapters Two, Five, Six, and Seven.

It is concerning that both the theological and the cosmic dimensions, so integral to the early Christian experience, are missing in many scholarly assessments. How accurate, therefore, can these assessments be? It is my conviction that they are not—at least, not fully. Hence the need to look through more comprehensive lenses at this experience. The concepts listed above are instrumental to that end. The same goes for other concepts and approaches: nature's big numbers, chaos theory, the fractal patterns, phenomenology's capacity of bridging the subject and the object, and transdisciplinarity's ternary, or inclusive, logic. Such concepts help me to capture the early Christian worldview in all its complexity, free of modern binaries, and to consider humankind together with the earth's ecosystem and the cosmos at large. Another valuable concept is the "syntactic space"²¹ which articulates the textual nature of the world as received in a certain community. I build on this notion towards discussing the world as "another scripture." These concepts also help me to translate the early Christian wisdom into an idiom intelligible to contemporary audiences, towards a wider applicability, beyond purely academic interests.

Through the interdisciplinary lens of the above concepts and fields, I see things differently; "different fields approach nature differently."²² And, to paraphrase Luke Barnes and Geraint Lewis, I have an idea that has consequences

(Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present* (New York and London: The New Press, 2008).

19 Asimov, *Prelude*, 104.

20 See *Evolution, Games, and God: The Principle of Cooperation*, ed. Martin A. Nowak and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013). My own explorations of the principle of synergy antedate this publication. For my earliest relevant study, see "Approaching the Christian Worldview with St Basil the Great: Aspects Relevant to Current Conversations in Science and Theology," *Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion* 6 (2009): 45–56, esp. 49, 52–53, 55.

21 See Bill Hillier and Julianne Hanson, *The social logic of space* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

22 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 15.

and I must explore them.²³ Indeed, as the saying goes among hard scientists, the method conditions the outcomes. However, while I look at things differently I build on the shoulders of giants.

The earliest contribution relevant to my purposes is David Sutherland Wallace-Hadrill's *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (1968).²⁴ As the title shows, the book focuses on ideas about the natural world. The material is organised thematically, offering important insights into the early Christian treatment of the earthly ecosystem and the heavens above. The great merit of this little book is that it evidences the generous use of scientific information in patristic works. Being a survey, however, it does not attempt textual analysis. However, although my analytical approach differs from the survey method, my admiration for Wallace-Hadrill's command of the relevant material remains undiminished. Of particular significance is his highlighting the interdisciplinary dimension of the early Christian worldview. I am profoundly indebted to this insight, contributing directly to my approach.

Closer to the method I follow here are Jaroslav Pelikan's works, *Christianity and Classical Culture* and *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?*²⁵ *Christianity and Classical Culture* emulates the survey approach we encountered in Wallace-Hadrill's work, the difference being that it largely focuses upon the Cappadocian theologians. His assessment of their engagement of the philosophical and scientific knowledge of late antiquity remains, in my view, normative. Nothing fundamentally new seems to have been added to Pelikan's contributions since then—at least not as regards awareness of the available sciences and the integration of scientific information into the Christian worldview. Subsequently, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* adopts the analytical approach, meticulously reconstructing the intellectual processes which led from Platonic cosmology—with Plato's *Timaeus* and Philo's interpretation of Genesis the main examples—to the early Christian worldview in Greek and Latin sources. Specifically, it explores the early Christian worldview at the nexus of scriptural wisdom, ancient philosophy, and theological insight. I draw on both of Pelikan's works, but prefer the analytical approach. The difference between his method and mine consists in the fact that, being receptive to newer

23 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 45.

24 *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press and Barnes & Noble, 1968).

25 *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993). *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* *Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint*, J.L. 31 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

trends in scholarship, I deploy more disciplinary tools than he did. For example, I adopt the recent scholarly viewpoint that Christian cosmology arose not only from an interest in cultural and apologetic dialogue, but predominantly from efforts in scriptural exegesis. While this view is germane to Pelikan's 1997 work,²⁶ we have since come to know a lot more about the scriptural grounds of cosmological thinking in the Christian tradition. Furthermore, Pelikan's treatment of the matters did not include the ascetic and the liturgical lenses, both crucial to my approach.

To my knowledge, after Pelikan's work, until recently no significant developments occurred in terms of exploring the early Christian representations of reality. While my book refers to a great many sources, nothing seemed to match his contributions. I blame overspecialisation again, as well as the instinctive reluctance of humanities scholars to engage scientific matters, cosmology included.

Fortunately, all this changed with the publication of the trailblazing book of Charlotte Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie* (2009).²⁷ This monumental work considers the philosophical foundations of several patristic interpretations of the Genesis creation narrative. In many ways, her book continues and develops Pelikan's analysis in *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* by visiting a number of Platonic philosophers of the Roman imperial era, focusing upon their use of Plato's *Timaeus*. Next, Köckert discusses the contributions of Origen of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nyssa to the interpretation of the Genesis narrative of creation. At every step, she notes the continuities and the discontinuities between these Christian authors and their Platonic sources. Her analysis shows how profoundly contextualised was the early Christian worldview, involving both ancient and late antique thinking. This is one aspect where Köckert goes far beyond Pelikan's investigation, who stopped at Philo's contributions. Another major contribution are the overwhelming proofs showing that the patristic authors remained profoundly anchored in scriptural wisdom. Her conclusion, with which I fully concur, is that early Christian cosmology emerged from scriptural interpretation against the backdrop of the philosophical trends current in late antiquity.

Partially, in Chapters Three, Five, and Six I draw on the patristic material which both Pelikan and Köckert studied, but without insisting upon the philosophical underpinnings they supplied. My examination of Christian authors

26 Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* 67–88.

27 *Christliche Kosmologie und kaiserzeitliche Philosophie: Die Auslegung des Schöpfungsberichtes bei Origenes, Basilius und Gregor von Nyssa vor dem Hintergrund kaiserzeitlicher Timaeus-Interpretationen*, STAC 56 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

earlier than Origen brings my approach closer to Pelikan's. However, I differ from both him and Köckert in that I allocate space for two fourth-century authors whom they have not discussed, namely, Athanasius and Evagrius.

Another difference consists in my appropriating Paul Blowers' approach in his book, *Drama of the Divine Economy* (2012),²⁸ which examines the theology of creation in many samples of early Christian and medieval literature. It does so by considering Christian cosmology against a complex traditional framework—hermeneutical, ascetic, and liturgical. While cultural antecedents are not missing in this treatment, Blowers perceives cosmology as part and parcel of the Christian experience. Specifically, he tackles the doctrine of creation in the scriptural narratives, together with the tradition of interpretation and their utilisation in liturgical texts. His presentation of the Genesis creation narrative and parallel Scriptures within the context of the church's liturgical life is a major contribution. I refer to it in Chapter Two. For my purposes here, however, most significant are his reference to the cosmos as "another scripture," and his point on hermeneutics as the right way to decipher the cosmic book. Useful to me is also his view that natural contemplation is a skill that does not belong to all; this skill is accessible to ascetically committed and advanced believers. Equally important is Blowers' point that, considered scripturally, liturgically, and contemplatively, the cosmos is rich and meaningful, not a pointless backdrop to human history.²⁹ The universe has lessons to offer, which astute Christians collect in order to articulate their own experience within God's creation. I discuss these matters in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

28 *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford University Press, 2012). The book incorporates and develops his earlier, and tremendously significant, contribution on the "two books," scriptural and cosmic. See Paul M. Blowers, "‘Entering This Sublime and Blessed Amphitheatre’: Contemplation of Nature and Interpretation of the Bible in the Patristic Period," in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700*, two vols, ed. Jitse M. Van Der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote, BSCB 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1:147–176. Equally relevant is Blowers' earlier concept of "the world in the mirror of scripture," which led him to "the world as another scripture." See Paul M. Blowers, "The World in the Mirror of Holy Scripture: Maximus the Confessor's Short Hermeneutical Treatise in *Ambiguum ad Joannem* 37," in *In Dominico Eloquio, In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul M. Blowers et al. (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2002), 408–426.

29 For an example of pushing the cosmos in the background of the interactions between God and humankind, see J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*, OTM (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Take her statement: "early [Christian] cosmology [is] ... the theological model which reveals basic assumptions about the nature and relation of God and humanity" (at 5). Cosmology, here, includes no reference to the cosmos. While the author mentions the world quite often, the universe she depicts is not meaningful.

The interest of Blowers in natural contemplation returned in an amplified form in Joshua Lollar's work, *To See into the Life of Things* (2013).³⁰ This book focuses upon the contributions of a medieval theologian, Maximus the Confessor, but begins by surveying several antecedents relevant here, Clement, Origen, the Cappadocian fathers, and Evagrius. Lollar's survey does not include the contributions of Ignatius, *Diognetus*, Irenaeus, and Athanasius, with which I deal in the first half of my book, nor does it refer to such matters as musical metaphors or the narrative universe. The merit of this book is that it broadens our understanding of the ascetic appreciation for natural contemplation. At times, Lollar's approach complements my own, which I duly acknowledge.

Overall, I emulate Wallace-Hadrill and Pelikan's research in natural philosophy, Köckert's analytical approach, Blowers' traditional contextualisation, and Lollar's elaborations on the ascetic grounds of natural contemplation. I do so within the interdisciplinary framework and through the concepts outlined above. Therefore, while in some matters I concur with these authors—as will become obvious throughout this book—of necessity the outcomes of my investigation differ from theirs. The difference increases given that I borrow other elements from the broader disciplinary pool of cultural, early Christian, and religious studies. Thus, I discuss apocalyptic motifs, musical metaphors, heuristic pedagogy, the *paideia* curriculum, philosophy as a way of life, the rise of the “holy man,” and the threefold spiritual curricula. The details of how I implement these elements will become apparent as the chapters unfold.

Given its significance for Chapters Three and Four, let me briefly allude here to one example, the “holy man.” I borrow the concept as Peter Brown discussed it.³¹ He pointed out the fact that the Christian saint embodied and transformed the ideals of classical *paideia*. Brown discussed the similarities and the dissimilarities between the ancient and the late antique exemplars of perfection, but what is crucial is that his “holy man” is an educated saint with an interest in contemplation. I refer this typology to the contributions of Clement and Origen of Alexandria, and Evagrius Ponticus. The towering figure of the “holy man” made a profound impact upon their thinking. Clement delved at length into what he called “holy gnostic,” by which he captured the profile of the “holy man” as possessed of superior education and fully invested in the pursuit of knowledge. No wonder Clement's theory of natural contemplation focuses more upon the successful contemplative, the “holy gnostic,” and less on methodological matters. In turn, Origen and Evagrius wrote complex metaphorical narratives, cos-

30 *To See into the Life of Things: The Contemplation of Nature in Maximus the Confessor and His Predecessors*, MP (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

31 See Peter Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations* 2 (1983): 1–25.

mological and eschatological in their outlook, and redolent with apocalyptic tropes. But their interest was also in conveying the experiences of the “holy man,” a gnostic and a saint. At least this is how I read their speculations. In my reading, I borrow from Karen Torjesen and Peter Martens’ treatment of the holy interpreter as central to patristic exegesis,³² Bogdan Bucur’s view of Clement’s “ladder of divine ascent” as interiorised apocalyptic,³³ and Vlad Niculescu’s reconstruction of Origen’s thinking as fundamentally hermeneutical.³⁴ Their contributions further nuance Brown’s “holy man.” I chose to examine this case in detail because of its ramifications for contemporary scholarship, which takes the speculations of Origen and Evagrius at *prima facie* value—not as hagiological metaphors—with serious repercussions for our grasp of the matters at hand.

After this methodological outline, I must now turn to the specifics of my topic.

2 Framing the Topic

This book considers the way the early Christians (from the second to the mid-fifth century) represented the cosmos, through a scriptural lens, liturgically, ascetically, by way of the available sciences, and contemplative approaches. It also discusses how they construed their own place in the order of things, and their activity within the world. In a very recent contribution, Louth suggested a similar approach.³⁵ To grasp their perceptions I refer to their worldview, representation of reality,³⁶ doctrine of creation, and cosmology; I use these terms fairly interchangeably. These terms, however, are not all of a piece. They retain specific meanings which on occasion demand the use of one and not

32 Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, OECs (Oxford University Press, 2012). Karen Jo Torjesen, “The Alexandrian Tradition of the Inspired Interpreter,” in *Origeniana Octava*, ed. Lorenzo Perrone, BETL 164 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2003), 1:287–299.

33 Bogdan G. Bucur, “Hierarchy, Eldership, Isangelia: Clement of Alexandria and the Ascetic Tradition,” in *Alexandrian Legacy: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Doru Costache et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 2–45.

34 Vlad M. Niculescu, “Origen and Logocentrism: A Few Observations on a Recent Debate,” in *Alexandrian Legacy*, 46–69.

35 Louth, “Basil and the Fathers,” 67–68.

36 By reality I mean the domain of things that are—etymologically *res*—by extension the whole of the cosmos, yet in a theological perspective, therefore considered with reference to God.

of another. And as the theological cast of mind of the early Christians and the contemporary scientific cosmology differ, I give precedence to the first three terms. They refer, respectively, to the sum of beliefs concerning the cosmos and the place Christians hold within it, the understanding of the world and its processes, and the understanding of the cosmos as God's creation.

The sources analysed here do not give a complete map of the universe as the early Christians perceived it. While readers cannot expect an exact description of the world—or nature for that matter—these examples bring to the fore aspects and stages of the way they, i.e. early Christians viewed the cosmos and their place within it. Three main phases of this process are apparent. Initially, Christians were hesitant about all things worldly, but very soon they began to depict the cosmos as a welcoming home. Next they came to realise the significance of their place in the world and their call to interact with it in creative fashion. Eventually they progressed to considering reality through a multifocal, interdisciplinary lens.

This historical trajectory makes plain why in the beginning the early Christians referred to the world tangentially, for example in order to speak of God's might and wisdom revealed in creation. As time passed, they incrementally adopted a cosmological cast of mind. This amounts to saying that the cosmos and the relation of Christians to it sequentially moved from the periphery to the centre of their theological reflection. This gradual shift was determined by internal factors, such as the need of defining Christian identity, as well as external, such as communicating Christian tenets, values, and views to a sometimes hostile culture. To illustrate this shift, I introduce the relevant cases in chronological order, with two exceptions. I begin my analysis with a mid-second-century anonymous work, *Diognetus*, which exemplifies caution towards a world which it represents as unfriendly. I then turn to an earlier witness—from the beginning of the same century—Ignatius' *Ephesians*. This letter depicts a universe free of evil, reorganised, and "congregational" in its outlook. The perception of this source is distinctly positive. I treat these two sources in the reverse order because, to an extent, *Diognetus*' position matches the earliest Christian view, to be evinced from such passages as Matt 16:24–26 and Heb 13:14. I do not attach any particular significance to *Diognetus*' return to a hesitant attitude, decades after the positive approach recorded in *Ephesians*. Being conditioned by contingent challenges, throughout history the Christian community continued to alternate between positive and negative appraisals of the world; it still does, if we think of the contemporary oscillations between conservative and progressive stances. The second exception is the treatment of Evagrius together with Athanasius, in Chapter Four, before Basil (Chapter Five), his former teacher. I do so to emphasise the Egyptian monastic lineage

of Athanasius and Evagrius, and given Evagrius' direct and indirect Athanasian references. Apart from the exceptions noted just above, I treat the remaining sources chronologically.

While the factors at play are complex, overall my analysis operates with the assumption that what conditioned the early Christian worldview and its shifts of perspective were foremost reactions to external stimuli. To understand the dynamics of this worldview therefore requires us to assess the varied contexts—cultural, historical, and social—of its formation. It also entails considering the minds, emotions, and aspirations of the writers themselves, in the circumstances of their experience. It is for this reason that the tools of contemporary historical research—or rather psycho- and socio-historical—are integral to my approach.³⁷ Accordingly, I discuss cosmological topics only together with the personal and the contextual parameters of their articulation. A few details about the authors under consideration are therefore in order.

Most of these authors shared in common the fact of having written under pressure—in times of either persecution against the Christian community or sectarian strife—when their world seemed to be unmade. They were all mainstream, apostolic Christians, also known as catholic and orthodox. The second- and third-century representatives of this tradition—Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyon, the anonymous author of *Diognetus*, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen of Alexandria—tackled the uncomfortable status of a persecuted Christian minority whose values were ridiculed by opponents. The same holds true for Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, and Aristides, whose contributions I discuss only in passing. In turn, the fourth- and the fifth-century authors—Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom—reacted to waves of criticism levelled at Christians at the time of Julian the Apostate's rise to power. Gregory the Theologian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nemesius of Emesa, and Theodoret of Cyrus, whose thinking I address only in passing, did the same.

The psychosocial impact of persecution and marginalisation cannot be underestimated. These authors were not spared. However, when their fellow believers experienced turmoil and confusion—the *mundus* being *contra* them—through their writings they attempted to comfort them by depicting the world in familiar and solicitous hues. Accordingly, out of pastoral concerns, they presented the *mundus* as God's creation, a welcoming place, a shelter which they could appreciate and, in return, at whose wellbeing they could actively contribute. In doing so, these writers worked towards clarifying

37 Slade, "The Socio-Historical Method," 5–6.

the Christian representation of reality. This is definitely the case of *Diognetus*' author and the other second- and third-century writers. They all contemplated an ordered, harmonious, and theologically meaningful universe, divinely governed and accommodating the Christian ecclesia. The same goes for the fourth- and fifth-century writers who undertook to remind their contemporaries that the theologically meaningful cosmos confirms their faith. But these later representatives of the tradition, especially Basil and his brother Gregory, perforce inaugurated further vistas of enquiry. They articulated complex cosmologies to rival those of their critics, thus encouraging hesitant believers to stay the course. It is primarily through them that the Christian view of the cosmos moved from the periphery to the centre of theological reflection.

While their fundamental convictions ultimately coincided, when faced by crisis these authors reacted differently. They were people of their respective times and places, which conditioned their response to challenges. The sense of transience pertaining to the present age determined the earlier authors to focus on matters beyond the immediate, the wasteland of mundane things, and this life itself. Christian identity and future glory were at the forefront of their reflection. As a result, they did not spend much time discussing the universe. Their position was of course justified in an age when Christians felt mostly unwelcome. But for the later authors the cosmos—this side of eternity—was no longer a gloomy place to quickly abandon for the sake of things beyond. Accordingly, they developed complex representations of reality. Their contributions denote a shift in the Christian mentality from the early decades of the fourth century, perfectly illustrated by a document to which they subscribed, namely, the Creed of Nicaea (augmented at Constantinople in 381). This document affirms that all trinitarian persons are active participants in the creation of the cosmos.³⁸ As such, the world is the Lord's, and there is no reason to fear or despise it.

But let me present the basic contributions of these authors in the order of the chapters within this monograph.

38 See Doru Costache, "The Orthodox Doctrine of Creation in the Age of Science," *JOCs* 1:2 (2019): 43–64, esp. 49.

3 A Tour to the Chapters

Chapter One, “Not of the world, but in it,” focuses on *Diognetus*, an anonymous apologetic tract possibly written in the mid-second century. Its erudite author laboured to convince the addressee of the superiority of the Christian faith and way of life, compared to antecedent traditions. The work begins by dismantling major tenets of the Greco-Roman and Judaic frameworks, and then presents the Christian experience. It movingly depicts the paradoxical condition of Christians in a world that does not welcome them, but to whose well-being they contributed as the soul does to its body. Also relevant here is the fact that the work introduces important outlines of the doctrines of creation, providence, and salvation. These are undoubtedly meant to represent the world as a welcoming place, a strategy which corresponds to Bardaisan (d. 222) and Theophilus of Antioch’s (d. ca. 180) approaches. Chapter One follows a similar pattern.

After presenting *Diognetus* against the landscape of early Christian literature, I consider sections 5–6 in detail, which address the transcendence of believers to and immanence in this world. I suggest that the touchstone shaping their ethos is God’s position with reference to the cosmos. These sections do not say anything directly about the natural world, but they do bring to the fore an interesting point, namely, that cosmic stability increases with the Christian presence in the world. I understand this point—and another one in the tenth section—as indications of what contemporary cosmologists call the anthropic principle. I also consider the significance of *Diognetus* 5–6 for defining Christian identity in late antiquity, together with their possible echoes in later sources, such as the fourth-century *Spiritual Homilies* of Ps-Macarius and other ascetic writings of the Byzantine era. Common to these sources is the sense that Christians contribute to the flourishing of the world.

In the last part of Chapter One I analyse examples of straightforward cosmological thinking. *Diognetus* mentions God’s irreducibility to things created, the world’s transience, the perishability of matter, the future perfection and immortality of the universe, creation’s goodness, cosmic order, and the anthropic purposefulness of the world. *Diognetus* 7 includes a detailed inventory of the created universe, which I discuss at some length by drawing parallels to Aristides (d. first half of the second century) and Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 212), the author’s supposed contemporaries. While *Diognetus* begins by deploring the dire situation of Christians in the world—illustrating the first stage of articulating the Christian worldview—it ends by a positive message regarding the cosmos as God’s creation made to accommodate humankind, and to which Christians contributed.

Chapter Two, “Cosmic harmony,” explores a series of writings from the early second century to the second half of the fourth century. These are: Ignatius of Antioch’s (d. ca. 110) *Ephesians*, Irenaeus of Lyon’s (d. ca. 200) *Heresies*, Clement of Alexandria’s *Exhortation*, and Athanasius of Alexandria’s (d. 373) *Gentiles*. Arguably, the last two authors were influenced by the previous two. I also mention Philo of Alexandria (d. ca. 50), whose cosmological thinking inspired a great many early Christian authors, Clement of Rome’s (d. late first century) *First Corinthians*, and Origen’s (d. ca. 254) *Homilies on the Psalms*. I contend that, corresponding to the last sections of *Diognetus*, these contributions mark the second stage of development of the early Christian worldview. These sources reinterpret the cosmos as welcoming for Christians; the world is a divinely crafted home whose inhabitants sing praises to the creator and saviour of all; the home itself sings hymns. In Clement and Athanasius, this message pairs with exhortations meant for hesitant members fascinated by the classical wisdom, to stay the Christian course. Their specific interests notwithstanding, what links these writers is, together with their commitment to the doctrine of creation, a shared musical sensibility.

Anchored in the church’s liturgical rhythms, this sensibility enabled them to perceive the universe as a melody and to depict it as musically attuned. Melodic imagery served well their purposes to contemplate a world that belongs to all and is home to everyone, and also, a theologically meaningful world whose message converges with the convictions of believers. The authors under consideration did so in ways which satisfied the expectations of the intelligentsia. Focusing on this feature of their discourse, I then analyse representations of the choral and symphonic cosmos—its theological meaningfulness—whose melodious order and harmony encodes divine intentions concerning creation’s final destination. This world is not one of merely quantitative assessments. Founded on numbers, measures, and patterns which shape its nature, this universe is warm, alive, and dynamic, full of spontaneous movements that match the congregation’s ecstatic doxologies. Indeed, God’s creation, this singing universe, displays a “syntactic” consistency to which all things contribute. Their input engenders a musical narrative which its addressee—the human being—must decipher in order to learn about God, itself, and the purpose of things.

While I discuss how the mentioned sources formulate this message, I call attention to its connection with the theme of the cosmos as “another scripture.” This is a theme virtually ignored in contemporary scholarship. I also point out that, within the contributions examined here and against the backdrop of church’s liturgical sensibilities, the cosmos as “another scripture” crosses paths with the classical concepts of number, measure, order, and musical harmony. Such a crossover yields a rich worldview, in many ways compatible with con-

temporary cosmology. This worldview, however, is not descriptive—it is contemplative. Chapters Three and Four, accordingly, address the details of natural contemplation.

Chapter Three, “Contemplation of the natural world: The second and the third century,” begins by discussing the cultural factors which led to the emergence of Christian contemplative approaches to the cosmos. These are the *paideia* system of education, with its goal of transforming the person; the philosophical quest for virtue and knowledge, which included contemplative exercises; the rise of the “holy man” in late antiquity and the impact of this human model upon educated Christians; and the perpetuation of these factors in the Christian ascetic experience. Against this backdrop, I turn to Clement of Alexandria’s “holy gnostic.” The gnostic embodies what he calls the “gnostic tradition,” by which he means the Gospel and its preachers. The “gnostic tradition” is not a repository of data; it is a framework wherein diligent believers can attain perfection. Perfection refers to both ethical achievements and knowledge, but it ultimately consists in personal transformation—the attainment of holiness. The prospect of such an achievement enthralls Clement completely, the “holy gnostic” becoming his primary topic. Clement also develops the classical curriculum of ethics, physics, and epoptics by identifying three further stages within physics: description, interpretation, and vision. These stages together constitute an interdisciplinary schema—a multifocal lens—which integrates scientific description, scriptural and liturgical interpretation, and theological insight. The “holy gnostic,” skilled in the use of such instruments, sees the complexity and meaningfulness of the universe. This truly revolutionary development paved the way for Origen, Basil (d. 379), and Evagrius (d. 399). Origen also picked up the significance of the threefold curriculum, but preferred to anchor natural contemplation within scriptural grounds. To paraphrase Blowers, Origen’s is a world contemplated in the mirror of Scripture. However, apart from his bold speculations about reality, his worldview does not differ much from Clement’s own. Nor does his portrayal of the Christian saint, educated, ascetic, and contemplative.

Though walking under Origen’s guidance is an absorbing experience, from my viewpoint the main challenge is to understand the meaning of his “metaphysical” speculations in *Principles*. To this matter I dedicate most of my analysis. As a range of scholarly studies point to the hermeneutical nature of his discourse, I propose that his speculations must be read only as his own disciples did. Trained in heuristic pedagogy, they were equipped to think things through, to snatch the right conclusions out of a welter of speculation, to decode parables and metaphors, and to identify the spiritually formative message of the texts. Accordingly, I show that Origen’s “metaphysical” musings encode an

anthropological narrative, or rather one on the holy life. I test my interpretation against his *Homily*, where cosmology runs parallel with hagiology, providing a map of the spiritual journey. I conclude by drawing the contours of Origen's interdisciplinary worldview, whose layers range from the physical to the metaphysical, incorporating scientific, scriptural, and theological perspectives.

Chapter Four, "Contemplation of the natural world: The fourth century," continues this train of thought by examining the contributions of Athanasius and Evagrius. Both relied on the earlier Alexandrian thinkers, whose positions, however, they adapted with originality. Thus, their respective approaches to natural contemplation do not substantially differ from Clement and Origen's, but they do reframe the method within the social realities of their own century, in particular the rise of monasticism. For example, both reflected upon Antony's towering figure and other ascetic exemplars of the Egyptian desert. This gave them occasion to realise novel aspects pertaining to contemplation and the ascetic life. It is difficult to conceive of Athanasius and Evagrius' iteration of natural contemplation as anything but the outcome of their exposure to contemporary ascetics. Evagrius followed Athanasius in this regard; usually, scholars take no notice of Athanasius' impact upon Evagrius. Nevertheless, Athanasius inaugurated the tradition of integrating monastic eyewitness accounts into his spiritual discourse. Without acknowledging it, Evagrius emulated his example. Nevertheless, there is a major difference between them. Athanasius was not interested in organising natural contemplation as a method, whereas Evagrius was quite pedantic in this regard. It appears that Athanasius felt no need to schematise the method because his favourite paradigm, Antony, embodied it, without needing to expound on it. Evagrius himself was aware of several great ascetics, but his intellectual training under the Cappadocian theologians got the better of him. He believed, accordingly, that the method must be rigorously articulated. That said, Athanasius and Evagrius were agreed that—as God's creation—the cosmos is ordered and meaningful. They also shared the view that the human being is both equipped and called to understand the cosmos. Both followed the threefold curriculum and, it may be argued, built upon Clement's nuancing of physics. Furthermore, relating to their fascination for Antony and other desert ascetics, they treated metaphorically the "holy man" performing natural contemplation.

On this last count, however, whereas Athanasius maintains a moderate tone, preferring the scriptural setting, Evagrius goes off the charts, matching Origen's flamboyant speculations. In the latter's footsteps, he presents the holy life under the guise of a cosmological narrative, supposedly for the benefit of his monastic disciples. As in Origen's case, his speculations must be considered heuristic devices inviting the advanced to decipher them, and not taken at face

value. And while Evagrius' cosmological metaphors do not report too much about the universe itself—that was not his primary intent—once his discourse is decoded there is much we can learn from his way of representing reality from the stance of the contemplative person. His and Athanasius' contributions to this area resonate with the blending of objective science and subjective insight we find in Basil's worldview. But at this juncture we discover another difference between Evagrius and Athanasius' approaches: whereas Evagrius was an elitist, primarily writing for advanced ascetics, Athanasius popularised the ascetic experience and, with it, natural contemplation. Basil followed Athanasius' path.

Chapter Five, "From the periphery to the centre," assesses the contributions of a Cappadocian theologian, Basil of Caesarea. With him, cosmology comes into its own, shifting to the centre of theological concerns, and exemplifying the mature age of the early Christian worldview. I focus on *Hexaemeron*, but I also make reference to some other works, such as *Address* and *Spirit*. I compare his contributions with writings by predecessors like Theophilus, Origen, and Athanasius, and his followers, Gregory of Nyssa (d. ca. 395) and John Chrysostom (d. 407). I examine Basil's interdisciplinary formulation of the Christian worldview, which weaves together scientific data, scriptural revelation, and spiritual insight. Facilitating the integration of these three viewpoints is his distinction—reminiscent of Clement's—between description and interpretation, scientific research and theological hermeneutics. Accordingly, Basil calls upon the available sciences to describe natural phenomena, reserving it for a scripturally grounded theology to interpret the cosmos as creation. Thus he was able to avoid syncretism. What conditioned his approach is a complex strategy, pastoral and missional in scope. He aimed at transposing the doctrine of creation from the Semitic mythos of Genesis to the Hellenic idiom of his time, with a view to both edifying church membership and reaching out to "external" (pagan) audiences. It is against this backdrop that Basil considered the scientific worldview of his time through the lens of a scripturally grounded theology of creation. To that end, he introduced another distinction—never before seen with such clarity in the Christian tradition—between scientific description and theological interpretation. It is this distinction which accounts for his critique of the cosmological theories of the time, a critique usually taken to signify an opposition to science. What he opposed were ideological views—from atheism to agnosticism to pantheism—which through their misuse of science were responsible for construing the incompatibility of science and theology; as then, so now. By introducing this new distinction, and by refuting the scientific claim of ideologies, Basil facilitates the encounter of science and theology. On the bridge he erected, both could interact unhindered even as they con-

tinue to exercise their distinct tasks of describing and of interpreting reality respectively. Chapter Five showcases Basil's accomplishments in this field by discussing his nuanced view of nature and the cosmos, anchored in the naturalism of the sciences, and his theological stance that God is present in all things, permeating the movement of the universe from beginning to end.

My analysis next focuses on the principle of synergy, here referring to Basil's view that the divine and the natural energies interact on a continuous basis. He introduced this principle by way of interpreting the Genesis narrative of creation. The merit of his synergetic interpretation is that it pinpoints an area where the scientific and the theological views of nature appear to complement each other. In the final section of the chapter, I assess the spiritual dimension of his method, his contemplative exercises. We have already seen that Basil considered the world as the available sciences described it, and saw it through the lens of a scripturally informed theology of creation. But his approach to natural contemplation included two more elements. The first concerns personal purification, without which no true comprehension of either Scripture or the cosmos is possible. The second concerns turning upon the cosmos the same anagogic lens used in the spiritual interpretation of Scripture. The anagogic lens enables the contemplative to tap into the formative and transformative message of the two books, scriptural and cosmic. Obviously, here, again, he drew on Clement and Origen's preceding contributions, applying their method to the "cosmic school." He borrowed this idea from Origen for use in *Hexaemeron*, but adjusted it in keeping with Athanasius' ascetic reinterpretation. My proposal is that *Hexaemeron* constitutes an implicit exemplification of his method—corresponding to Origen's *Principles*—and that it is an invitation to appropriate its lessons through heuristic devices. I find no other explanation for the blatant discrepancy between *Hexaemeron*'s prologue, where we encounter a metaphorical depiction of the threefold curriculum, and the rest of the treatise. I do not describe Basil's worldview in detail; I focus on methodological matters, in view of the following chapter, which discusses Cappadocian cosmology in the thinking of Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa.

Chapter Six, "Description and interpretation," investigates Gregory of Nyssa's contributions to the early Christian worldview. Given the marginalisation of his *Apology* within the tradition and in scholarship, I begin by discussing it at some length. Specifically, I revisit the established view that he defended and continued Basil's work on creation. Select passages from *Apology* and from his earlier treatise, *Constitution*, show that despite his recurrent expressions of reverence for his brother, Gregory never meant to confine himself to Basil's legacy. Nevertheless, while this may not have been Gregory's intent, the continuity between his treatises and *Hexaemeron* is inescapable. True, sometimes his views col-

lided with Basil's, but, apart from a few differences, overall he adopted and adapted his brother's method. His interests are difficult to identify. He never stated them expressly, and the unstructured outline of the work—which looks like a draft, not a work ready for dissemination—makes the task of tracing them even more difficult. Gregory himself acknowledges that *Apology* does not give an authoritative teaching. He may have devised this treatise as a clever response to the anti-Christian sentiments of that time. Thus, by producing a draft, Gregory seemingly wished to convey that even when it takes this form the Christian worldview is the match of other theories. It is here that the apologetic character of the writing becomes evident. In discussing it, I counter the scholarly assessment that *Apology* is an exegetical work. If instead it is primarily an apologetic work, no wonder it borrows from Basil's *Hexaemeron*, which entwines apologetics and exegesis. Nevertheless, *Apology* is not a servile imitation of Basil's homilies. Emulating his brother, Gregory combines scientific and theological approaches in order to reconcile Genesis with the available scientific knowledge, and to render it in the idiom of the day. But this is where Gregory dramatically diverges from his sibling's approach. He allocates far more space for scientific information than Basil ever did. As a result, his treatise is a pedantic exposé of scientific theories, in which there is not much room for theological commentary and spiritual advice. Hence in my view *Apology* is an indirect answer to the culture wars of that time.

In the second half of this chapter, I address topics of the Christian representation of reality, an area where Gregory contributed markedly. In addition to borrowing Basil's principle of synergy, he developed a theory of matter, framed scientifically, philosophically, and theologically. His concept of matter is complex and multilayered, richer than both its classical antecedents and its modern iterations. Created matter is natural and supernatural, material and immaterial, a given as well as a process. From this thick representation of matter Gregory inferred a complex cosmology. The latter takes its starting point in what we today call chaos theory and then refers to continuous evolutionary processes, which unfold from the beginning to the end of time. Gregory considers that darkness and light signify chaos and order respectively, and treats the two terms in relation to a tension within the scriptural account, creation as a single event and multiple events. I conclude by studying Gregory's view about creation and evolution, stability and dynamism, randomness and purposefulness.

Chapter Seven, "Anthropic perspectives," turns to a topic in Gregory of Nyssa's *Constitution* and John Chrysostom's *Genesis*, comparing their proposals to other authors, such as Gregory the Theologian (d. ca. 389), Nemesisius of Emesa (d. end of the fourth century), Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. ca. 428), and Theodoret of Cyrus (d. ca. 460). The topic in question is Philo's analogy

of the king and the palace, which Gregory and John adapted to their slightly differing purposes. Philo grapples with the question of why in Genesis the human being—the noblest of creations—was introduced *after* the rest of the biosphere. What caused his puzzlement is the inconsistency between the Genesis account and the classical notion that nobility presupposes antiquity. With great skill, he shows that, as the king arrived only when the palace was built, so the creator introduced humankind when the earthly habitat was in a position to welcome it. This question troubled Gregory to some extent. He does not advertise it as such, but argues in favour of human superiority to the rest of the creation, against the backdrop of affirming the ontological solidarity of humankind and the cosmos. To make his point, he describes the chain of being leading from the mineral layer of reality to humankind, which he ponders in philosophical fashion. Although his approach differs from Philo's, he must have been aware of the debate. John for his part expresses the same concern forthrightly, closely following Philo's train of thought. Gregory's philosophical nuances are not lost on him, but, given the homiletic setting of his discussion, John pursues the topic exegetically.

In addressing their contributions, I examine the implications of the analogy of the king and the palace. I consider it together with their views of the cosmos, the earthly environment, the biosphere, and humankind created in God's image. I propose that their conclusions converge despite methodological variations. Both understood that human superiority does not amount to dominating the world in despotic fashion. Their agreement should not come as a surprise, since all early Christian authors, not only Gregory and John, adhered to a scripturally rooted doctrine of creation and to an anthropic cosmology.

Regarding their respective approaches, Gregory, given his scientific preferences—already obvious in his *Apology*—presented a grandiose narrative of cosmic consistency. This narrative echoes Gregory the Theologian's *Oration* 38, where the strands of reality intersect and are mutually inclusive. Thus, humankind did not emerge out of nothing to rule over the universe. Its emergence is the outcome of what Gregory, followed by Nemesius, described as a divinely guided evolutionary process. Ontological solidarity characterises the cosmos, its components, and humankind. But a humankind fashioned in the image of God remains superior and irreducible to created nature. John, in turn, discoursed at length about humankind being in the image of God and called to resemble the divine. For him, as for Theodore, the human being is royal from the outset, blessed with the gift of sovereignty through the divine mark. But in order to own their nobility truly human beings must live divinely, corresponding to Theophilus' image of the master of a household. This requires asceticism, moderation, and self-restraint, which lead to serenity, gentleness, and

personal transformation. Theodoret adopted the same view. Important is that, once acquiring gentleness, humanity neither rules greedily nor exploits the environment. Instead, its royalty encompasses the creation in its entirety. All things live within the same kingly abode and are of one royal family. It follows that, despite variances in their approaches, Gregory and John held very similar views. This commonality goes beyond their interest in the analogy in question. Both believed that humankind's presence conditions the coherence of the universe—in other words, that the impact of human activity is cosmic. Here, their insistence on the attainment of virtue acquires more than an individualistic ethical significance: ascetically achieved, human virtue is an organising factor catalysing creation's fulfilment. This chapter ends by emphasising the import of this conclusion for environmental concerns, and its connection with the believer's relation to the cosmos discussed in Chapter One.

4 A Proleptic Synthesis

In the light of the above, this book begins by analysing the relationship between humankind and the world (Chapter One), and finishes by considering the impact of an ascetically transformed humanity upon cosmic order and harmony (Chapter Seven). This symmetrical yet dynamic structure reflects the developing interest of the early Christians in articulating a theological worldview that pieces together humanity, the biosphere, the earth, and the cosmos in its entirety. The particularities of the sources and the scope of the remaining chapters fill the gaps in the coherent framework of Chapters One and Seven by showcasing how the early Christians considered the world itself. Thus, between the brackets represented by Chapters One and Seven, the book treats representations of reality by way of ecclesiastical, liturgical, and musical imagery (Chapter Two), contemplatively (Chapters Three and Four), and through the interdisciplinary lens of scriptural interpretation and the available sciences (Chapters Five and Six).

The above overview of chapters brought to the fore the wide range of intentions, themes, and approaches found in various sources. All of these sources have something important to say about the cosmos and the place Christians—or humankind more broadly—hold within it. Together with their shared theological assumptions, it is their reference to the world that secures the coherence of these sources within the tradition. It is their coherence that binds together the chapters of the present study.

Before concluding, I must address a few issues arising from the above survey of chapters.

The first issue is whether these sources should be ordered according to schools of thought. I pointed out above that Chapters One and Seven evaluate the approach of several early Christian writers to the relationship between humankind and the cosmos. There is undoubtedly a connecting line between these authors, but they lived too far away from one another—temporally and geographically—to be seen as representatives of one school. In turn, the two main authors whose contributions I discuss in Chapter Seven, namely, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom, shared an interest in Philo's analogy of the king and the palace, which illustrates the inherent connection of humanity and the world. This suggests a closer link, but their methodologies differ significantly. The sources examined in Chapter Two appear together given the musical ideas and sensibilities of their authors. And although Irenaeus was aware of Ignatius, Clement of Irenaeus, and Athanasius of Clement, because of their different approaches it would be unwise to think of them as one school. To profit from earlier authors does not necessarily imply allegiance to one school of thought. It goes the same for Chapters Three and Four, where their interest in natural contemplation does not mean that the contributions of Clement, Origen, Athanasius, and Evagrius purposefully improve on one another. While striking similarities can be found between Origen and Evagrius, their approaches also differed significantly. The main difference consists in their respective settings: Origen was an exegete, Evagrius a monastic adept and teacher. And while both shared with Clement and Athanasius an interest in the "holy man," neither of them contemplated the topic in quite the same way. Furthermore, Chapters Three and Four treat two Cappadocian theologians—and siblings at that—whose approach to the Genesis narrative of creation and the universe is in many ways similar. But similarities are matched by as many dissimilarities. No wonder scholars doubt the suitability of speaking of a distinct Cappadocian tradition.

Thus I do not intend to suggest that these authors belonged to one or more schools of thought. That said, they shared in what Johannes Zachhuber recently called "a sort of intellectual *koine*."³⁹ Specifically, they adhered to a common doctrine of creation shaped by a scripturally grounded faith, pertaining to the

39 In borrowing this phrase, I change its meaning. Zachhuber applied it only to the great theological and philosophical tradition that began with the Cappadocian fathers in the second half of the fourth century. See Johannes Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 6. From my viewpoint, and as it shall become apparent throughout this book, cosmology provided the authors treated here access to deeper common grounds than the concepts later forged in the fires of trinitarian and christological controversies.

mainstream Christian tradition. To paraphrase Carl Sagan, they all held in common the perception that “in the fabric of space and in the nature of matter, as in a great work of art, there is, written small, the artist’s signature.”⁴⁰ As such, they all perceived the cosmos as “hierophany,” a space destined for the manifestation of the sacred.⁴¹ Nevertheless, they all developed these common grounds according to personal interests.

Second, I must make clear why I chose these authors and these topics, rather than a broader historical sweep of sources, themes, and approaches. I have already stressed that my interest is in mainstream writers from the second to the mid-fifth century. I also pointed out that I study their relevant contributions which substantiate the coherence, complexity, and refinement of the Christian tradition they represent. It is for this reason that I leave out the Gnostics and the Manichaeans, despite the markedly cosmological frame of their thinking. Also, I am interested in representatives of the tradition who illustrate the sensitivities of a single cultural strand—Greek or Hellenised Christianity. Thus, apart from tangential references, I do not include in my survey Coptic, Latin, or Syriac speaking authors, since their impact upon the relevant writers cannot be substantiated in regard to the topics pursued here.⁴² True, adherence to the same mainstream Christian tradition of faith secured a certain level of commonality across the cultures. Nevertheless, the different cultural frameworks to which the early Christian writers belonged left indelible marks upon their respective contributions.

Third, and related, the topics included in this study illustrate the central sensitivities of the Greek-speaking tradition. For this reason, I do not pursue topics and the approaches beyond the list in my outline of chapters. For example, I mention only in passing what contemporary scholars call “temple theology,” namely, the representation of the cosmos through temple imagery.⁴³ I do not allocate more space to this theme because of the lack of evidence in the exam-

40 Carl Sagan, *Contact* (New York: Gallery Books, 2019), 372.

41 I borrow this term from Eliade, *The Sacred*, 11–12, 20–29, but not together with its narrow definition there. Closer to my idea of what the early Christians perceived about the universe, that all of it is awesome and holy, is Young’s (*The Shack*, 109–110) moving description of natural contemplation in the presence of the creator.

42 From this viewpoint, my approach differs significantly from Richard A. Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology: A Study in Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen* (New York: Seabury, 1965).

43 See Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (T&T Clark, 2010). Barker mentioned Irenaeus, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa (17–18, 286), concluding that the early Christians applied temple imagery to the cosmos. But these examples do not warrant the generalisation of her conclusions for the tradition considered here.

ined sources. The closest the authors studied here come to “temple theology” is in the analogies of the house and the palace discussed in Chapter Seven. These analogies, however, do not include the aspect of sacrality so prominent in temple imagery. Finally, I decided to leave out the topic of creation *ex nihilo*, to which I refer only tangentially. The main reason behind this exclusion is the very focus of this study, namely, the way the early Christians represented the cosmos and their own presence within it. One could say that they were interested in what contemporary cosmologist Paul Davies called “the goldilocks enigma”—the evidence that the whole universe conspires to accommodate human life. The topic of creation *ex nihilo* would have steered the discussion towards quite different concerns.

So, let the journey begin!

Not of the World, but in It

Initially the early Christians did not consider the scrutiny of the natural world on its own terms a priority.¹ The world was a setting for their encounter with God and the broader society—a stage where the “Great Dance” certainly unfolded,² but not an active participant in the chorus, let alone a major character of the script. The writing considered in this chapter, *Diognetus*, matches perfectly the spirit of its age, focusing as it does on theological, social, cultural, ethical, and religious matters. That said, in harmony with such cosmological passages of the New Testament as Col 1:18–20 and John 1:1–3, it does not entirely ignore either the earthly environment or the translunar regions of the universe. Even by way of hints and pointers, it draws a coherent worldview, combining elements from the classical cosmology and the doctrine of creation. In so doing, it gives us an idea of the way the early Christians perceived the cosmos. I shall turn to aspects of the Diognetian worldview in the last section of this chapter. But before that I focus on the overarching topic of this short treatise, the Christian condition in the world, to see how the early Christians interacted with their social and natural environment. This topic is of great interest if we seek to understand the particulars of the Christian experience through the ages. Henri-Irénée Marrou, the modern editor of the work and its major interpreter,³ and, closer to us, Ioan I. Ică Jr.,⁴ pointed out that *Diognetus* suggests solutions for our own contemporary difficulties. No wonder the interest of the scholars in this writing! By way of introduction, I will briefly look at what a couple of these scholars have to say.

In an important study, Judith Lieu⁵ discussed the contributions of the work to shaping early Christian identity. According to her, *Diognetus*, despite claiming that Christianity superseded older cultures, exhibits a “meta-identity” that

1 This chapter reutilises material from my study, “Christianity and the World,” which it presents in a completely new and expanded form.

2 See C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (ch. 17), in *The Space Trilogy: Out of the Silent Planet—Perelandra—That Hideous Strength* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2013), 334–339.

3 Henri-Irénée Marrou, “Commentaire,” in *À Diognète*, SC 33, 87–268, esp. 172–176.

4 Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Biserică, societate și gândire în Răsărit, în Occident și în Europa de azi,” in *Gândirea Socială a Bisericii: Fundamente, Documente, Analize, Perspective*, ed. I.I. Ică Jr. and Germano Marani (Sibiu: Deisis, 2002), 17–54, esp. 19.

5 Judith M. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 171–189.

includes both Jewish and Greek elements. The same can be said, I would observe, about all the other cultures the early Christians encountered, since Christian preaching cannot but be contextualised. Lieu's proposal is nevertheless important in that it shows that *Diognetus* offers an alternative to common conventions of cultural acceptance and rejection. However, while this is a valid point, ultimately her notion of an inclusive "meta-identity" does not resist scrutiny. At least not entirely. In what follows I argue that *Diognetus* envisages a theological identity which cannot be reduced to cultural inclusivity.

In turn, within his earlier mentioned analysis,⁶ Ică discovered signs of an ambitious plan to liaise between Christianity and late antique society. This project has never known perfect historical embodiments, but, he noted, it may yet inspire solutions for contemporary challenges. For instance, it could serve as a template for the institutional integration of Christian values within the European Union. I take no issue with the practicality of this proposal, which coheres with Christianity's bimillenary dream. Ică's interpretation, however, amounts to an eisegesis, not an exegesis of the treatise. We shall soon discover that *Diognetus* displays no interest in an institutional merger of Christianity and society. Instead, it explores ways of bridging the Christian ethos and the practices of everyday life at the grassroots, on the personal and communal level. As such, *Diognetus* matches the widespread view in late antiquity that, as Peter Brown pointed out, "despite a past littered with magnificent political experiments, a *state of affairs* never wielded the same exemplary power as did individual heroes and heroines."⁷ I would suggest that the institutional utopias Ică analysed—Rome, Constantinople, Moscow—failed to bridge Christianity and society precisely because they relied on policy and ideology instead of the infrastructural ground of personal and communal conversion. *Diognetus* calls the addressee to conversion, to a change of mentality and conduct,⁸ not to adhere to an institutional framework. That said, I do not imply that the treatise promotes a politically and socially disembodied message. I therefore disagree with the views of Abraham van de Beek that *Diognetus* illustrates the tendency to evade what the early Christians considered a corrupt and evil society.⁹

Observing the common approach in the early Christian studies, the above scholars discussed "the world" of *Diognetus* as society and culture, ignoring the topic of cosmology. It goes the same for most of the scholars I mention below.

6 Ică, "Biserică, societate și gândire," 17–22.

7 Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar," 2.

8 *Diognetus* 2.1.

9 Abraham van de Beek, "Every Foreign Land Is Their Native Country, and Every Land of Birth Is a Land of Strangers: *Ad Diognetum* 5," *JRT* 1 (2007): 178–194, esp. 185–188.

Not even Marrou ventured beyond passing references to the cosmos.¹⁰ But their considerations regarding the early Christian approaches to culture and society are not irrelevant. They clarify the mechanisms that facilitated the articulation of a corresponding worldview within *Diognetus* itself and in other sources, such as those I discuss throughout this book.

In what follows I review the immediate context and nature of the writing, then I examine the topic of Christians in the world, and finish with a discussion about the cosmos depicted in it. In the course of this analysis, I highlight certain similarities between *Diognetus* and other early Christian texts, which prove that, contrary to the current belief, the later tradition did not altogether neglect this enigmatic text.

1 Introducing *Diognetus*

Second-century Christians faced challenges that stemmed from their own specificity. In harmony with the Pauline teaching of 1 Cor 1:20–24, Gal 3:28, and Col 3:11, they represented themselves as bearers of divine wisdom and citizens of God's kingdom, refusing assimilation with either Jews or Gentiles. According to *Diognetus*, Christians were a “new race” which adhered to a distinct mindset and followed a “new way of life,”¹¹ not defined by blood, language, culture, or ethnicity. They were a different nation, a “third race”¹²—so counted after Jews and the Gentiles—but, as Guy Stroumsa pointed out, not in an ethnic sense.¹³

10 See Marrou, “Commentaire,” 182–183. More can be found at 137–146, where Marrou discusses the image of the soul in the body.

11 *Diognetus* 1. The concept of “new race or lifestyle” corresponds to Bardaisan’s “new people of us, Christians.” See *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, ed. and trans. Han J.W. Drijvers, second edn (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007). Bardaisan described the irreducibility of Christians to their milieu similarly. For further illustrations of this topic, see Lorenzo Perrone, “Christianity as ‘Practice’ in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*,” in *Origeniana Nona: Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time*, ed. G. Heidl and R. Somos, BETL 228 (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2009), 293–317, esp. 295–299.

12 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 183–184, 186. Richard Norris, “The apologists,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 36–44, esp. 37–38. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, three vols (Westminster: Christian Classics Inc., 1986), 1:193. The divinely guided history leading to the emergence of a third race reappears in Gregory the Theologian’s *Oration* 31.25.1–24.

13 Guy G. Stroumsa, “Philosophy of the Barbarians: On Early Christian Ethnological Representations,” in *Geschichte–Tradition–Reflexion: Festschrift Martin Hengel*, vol. 2, ed. Hubert Cancik et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 339–368, esp. 341. For the Disciple’s position, see William Horst, “The Secret Plan of God and the Imitation of God: Neglected Dimensions of Christian Differentiation in *Ad Diognetum*,” *J ECS* 27:2 (2019): 161–183, esp. 168–175.

The phrase “third race,” lacking in *Diognetus*, features in two roughly contemporary works, *The Preaching of Peter*¹⁴ and Aristides’ *Apology*.¹⁵ In all likelihood, the *Preaching* was a common source for Aristides and *Diognetus*.¹⁶

What matters is that, given their (self)definition as people who observed different standards and a strange way of life, Christians were perceived as a threat to the received views, to the imperial establishment, and to all.¹⁷ Not cowering through life, indeed, they were not ready to settle down into conformity and sameness. So they set the skies ablaze—as it were—and the consequences of their strangeness did not tarry. Countless martyrs answered for this perception with their lives, their courage both comforting the believers and stirring further animosity against them. Other Christians, known as apologists, risked their career, their social standing, as well as their own lives by writing in defence of their fellow believers.¹⁸ *Diognetus* is a precious historical witness to this very situation. One discovers in it, *pace* Lieu and Beek, a nuanced view of the “new race” as foreign and yet immanent in any social context.

This anonymous work, whose critical edition is still in the making,¹⁹ is in fact an exhortation, not an epistle. Sometimes listed among the apostolic fathers, it belongs to the apologetic genre. An educated Christian wrote it, it seems, in the second half of the second century or in the early third century,²⁰ perhaps

14 *The Preaching of Peter* 5.

15 Aristides, *Apology* 2.2.

16 Marrou, “Commentaire,” 121, 131–132.

17 *Diognetus* 5.17. Georges Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, Collected Works 2 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), 71–72. Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 196–197. Carolyn Osiek, “The self-defining praxis of the developing ecclesia,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, 1:274–292, esp. 274. Jeffrey S. Siker, “The second and third centuries,” in *The Early Christian World* (2017), 197–219.

18 See Mark Edwards, “Apologetics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, 549–564, esp. 550. Edwards’ suggestion that the apologists wrote for their fellow Christians rather than against their persecutors is correct, but it does not consider the circulation of published material beyond its intended readership. Christian apologies reached Gentile audiences and prompted answers. See Eric Osborn, “The Apologists,” in *The Early Christian World* (2000), 1:525–551.

19 Pär Sandin, “Diognetiana,” *VC* 61 (2007): 253–257. R.G. Tanner, “The Epistle to Diognetus and Contemporary Greek Thought,” *SP* 15:1 (1984): 495–508, esp. 505. See also below my note on ἑσθῆσι and ἑθῆσι.

20 Bart D. Ehrman, “Introduction,” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, LCL 24 (Cambridge, MA, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2:122–129. Paul Foster, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” *ET* 118:4 (2007): 162–168. Michael W. Holmes, “Introduction,” in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 528–531. Marrou, “Commentaire,” 241–268. Norris, “The apologists,” 43–44. Quasten, *Patrology*, 1:248–252. Tanner, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 495–496.

in Alexandria.²¹ Scholars believe that the later tradition remained oblivious of it. Taking his cue from Marrou,²² Ehrman, the most recent editor of the writing, stated that *Diognetus* was “never mentioned, let alone cited, by any of the church Fathers.”²³ While the lack of explicit references is obvious, it was not totally forgotten. Later we shall compare passages of its fifth and sixth chapters and passages from the *Fifth Spiritual Homily* attributed to Macarius the Egyptian.²⁴ My proposal is that Ps-Macarius borrowed from *Diognetus*, redrafting the material to correspond to the realities of the second half of the fourth century. Other early Christian texts echo similar views, showing that the tradition exemplified by *Diognetus*—if not *Diognetus* itself—was not forgotten. All these will be discussed below.

In the only manuscript ever found, dating apparently from the thirteenth century, the ten genuine chapters discuss how to communicate the Christian message to outsiders.²⁵ These chapters are followed by another two, taken from an anonymous homily on the revelation of God’s Son and the paradise narrative of Gen 2. This manuscript, now lost, was discovered by chance in 1436 and published in 1592.²⁶

Diognetus is a polemical work defending Christianity against malicious accusations. It denounces the decadence of Gentile culture and the sterile practices of contemporary Judaism.²⁷ The author’s intention is to persuade the recipient, Diognetus, also unidentified, if not a fictional character,²⁸ to become a Christian. It seems that the recipient, an educated Gentile interested in the faith,²⁹ delayed conversion because of the accusations levelled against Christians at the time. To allay his apprehensions, the author, known to posterity as “the Disciple,” undertook to convince him otherwise.

21 Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 19. Marrou, “Commentaire,” 265–268. Richardson places it in Asia Minor. See *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson, LCC (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 206–210.

22 Marrou, “Introduction,” 5–46, esp. 5.

23 Ehrman, “Introduction,” 127. This view is widespread. Foster, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 162, 167. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 529.

24 *Spiritual Homilies* 5.1–4.1–82.

25 Ehrman, “Introduction,” 123–124. Foster, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 163–166. Marrou, “Commentaire,” 98–240. Osborn, “The Apologists,” 526. Quasten, *Patrology*, 1: 249–251.

26 Ehrman, “Introduction,” 127–128. Foster, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 162–163. Humphries, *Early Christianity*, 80. Tanner, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 496–497.

27 Marrou, “Commentaire,” 98–118. Sandin, “Diognetiana,” 255. Tanner, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 500–501.

28 Ehrman, “Introduction,” 126. Tanner, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 498–499.

29 *Diognetus* 1.

The full scope of the argument—though very learned and instructive, and at times truly inspirational—is not my subject here. Attracting my immediate attention are two chapters, the fifth and the sixth,³⁰ which together constitute a coherent unity. Chapter five stresses the paradoxical state of Christians living in a hostile world, while chapter six shows how Christians nevertheless play a providential role in society and the world. I mine these chapters to see what they can tell us of the early Christian worldview.

2 In the World, but Not of This World

The heading of this section paraphrases a sentence from chapter six, expressing the Disciple's perception of the paradoxical condition of Christians in late antiquity: "Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world."³¹ This sentence sums up the main topic of the chapters under consideration—the nature of Christian lifestyle or polity³²—which it asserts with both prudence and courage. By stating that "Christians dwell in the world" it means to forestall the accusation that Christians were apolitical and antisocial.³³ By highlighting that they "are not of the world" it signifies that the Christian ethos differs from the beliefs and customs of their neighbours. At first glance, the two parts of the sentence appear to cancel each other. This must have often been the perception of Christianity's critics at the time, that it was full of contradictions and irrational. One can understand therefore why the author tried so hard to address the matter in a way that substantiated the superiority of the Christian polity. I must now turn to the first part of the sentence, namely, the statement that Christians are present in this world.

2.1 Immanence

According to the Disciple, the early Christians are not automatically and indiscriminately against the world, the broader society, and their contemporary culture. They do not cultivate the fact of being "different," at least in the external aspects of life. In the author's words,

30 For a detailed analysis of these chapters, see Marrou, "Commentaire," 119–176. For a summary, see Young, "Christian Teaching," 95–96.

31 Χριστιανοὶ ἐν κόσμῳ οἰκοῦσιν, οὐκ εἰσὶ δὲ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου (*Diognetus* 6.3). Cf. Jn 15:19; 17:14.

32 πολιτεία (*Diognetus* 5.4). Here I adopt Tanner's ("The Epistle to Diognetus," 502) translation, not "citizenship," as rendered by Ehrman.

33 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 183. Siker, "The second and third centuries," 207–210.

Christians do not differ from the rest of people in regards to land, or language, or their habits.³⁴ For nowhere do they dwell in cities of their own, nor do they employ some unusual language, nor do they practice a strange lifestyle.³⁵

Affirming Christian identity is not therefore a matter of abandoning culture and society in order to find refuge in an ivory tower—notwithstanding that the church of *Diognetus*, echoing the sentiments of the age,³⁶ is a militant one, intending to heal the corrupt heart of the world. The prevailing decadence is indeed problematic.³⁷ That said, Christian identity does not exclude what belongs to living in the here and now. Christians abide by the customs of their respective countries,³⁸ fully sharing in the life of their compatriots. Contrary to the often iterated suspicion of isolationism,³⁹ they are immanent to their context. They dwell together with their neighbours in a given neighbourhood, sharing in the local languages and culture. They are not *une secte excentrique*, as Marrou aptly noted.⁴⁰ Lieu corroborated his observation by concluding that “social separation” is not inherent to their ethos.⁴¹ No wonder the excerpt does not construe Christian identity in challenging terms. Christians do not manifest their difference—their godly conduct or “supernatural life”⁴²—ostentatiously. Being more a philosophical school and community of disciples than a new religion,⁴³ their peculiarity remains concealed from the

34 Here I follow Ehrman's edition, which gives ἔθῃσι (customs, habits). However, I purposely translate it as “habits,” which in English can be taken as both customs and clothing. In turn, Holmes (at 540) and Marrou (at 62) have ἔσθῃσι (clothing, vestments). It is uncertain why Holmes (541) translated ἔσθῃσι by “customs.” Could Holmes' unwarranted translation have prompted Ehrman's editorial change of ἔσθῃσι into ἔθῃσι or was it by assimilation with *Diognetus* 5.4, discussed below?

35 *Diognetus* 5.1–2.

36 Here is a contemporary example: “Consider the power of the new song (of the Gospel). It made human beings out of stones and again human beings out of beasts.” Clement, *Exhortation* 1.4.4.

37 *Diognetus* 2–3; 5.6–8; 8.1–4.

38 *Diognetus* 5.4. See Osiek, “The self-defining praxis,” 287.

39 Beek (“Every Foreign Land,” 185–186) echoes this very suspicion.

40 Marrou, “Commentaire,” 119 (see also 133–134). Florovsky (*Christianity and Culture*, 69) appropriated this view.

41 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 183.

42 Quasten, *Patrology*, 1: 250.

43 Doru Costache, “The Teacher and His School: Philosophical Representations of Jesus and Christianity,” in *The Impact of Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Bolt and James Harrison (Macquarie Park: SCD Press, 2021), 185–209, esp. 187–190. Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, 67. Young, “Christian Teaching,” 95–96.

outsiders,⁴⁴ hidden like the soul within a body. At its core, Christianity is first and foremost an interiorised commitment to Christ, not a matter of political and social activism. I shall return to the soul and body metaphor at a later stage.

After setting out this aspect of immanence, the Disciple proceeds to nuance the complex nature of the new ethos. As we read further down,

While living in either Greek or barbarian cities, depending on their lot, and following the local customs in regards to clothing, food, and the other aspects of life, they [sc. Christians] display, however, an astonishing and admittedly paradoxical condition of their way of life.⁴⁵

The earlier passage has adopted a reassuring tone, stating that Christians are well adjusted to their neighbourhood. The largest part of the excerpt just quoted continues the same train of thought, depicting their familiar outlook. It discloses concrete features of their identity such as sharing in the local customs concerning food and clothing. The end of the sentence, however, addresses a wholly different matter, the contrast between the new lifestyle and the worldly mindset. Although external matters do not differentiate Christians, their “astonishing and admittedly paradoxical” polity or way of life does. Albeit a benign presence in society, they are nevertheless “strange.” This is a tacit admission that, after a fashion, they were suspected for good reason.

The Christian lifestyle is not simple. Lieu elucidates two aspects in the *Diognesian* notion of Christian polity. There is the “internal self-identity, clearly defined and separate,” and the “external, observed identity,” which eschews “visible differentiation.” The two aspects, internal and external, converge into a “highly articulated meta-identity”⁴⁶ which synthesises foreign elements, primarily Jewish, but also Hellenistic. Instead of differentiation, Christian identity is built up by inclusion⁴⁷ or multicultural syncretism. The established view of Christian distinctiveness as exclusive of “earlier dichotomies,” such as Jewish vs Gentile, does not stand. I concur that, since the early Christians “follow the local customs,” *Diognetus* does not describe a decontextualised experience.⁴⁸

44 “Their godly devotion remains invisible.” *Diognetus* 6.4.

45 *Diognetus* 5.4. See Perrone, “Christianity as ‘Practice,’” 296–297.

46 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 179.

47 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 187.

48 A number of second-century Christian apologists acknowledged the continuity between antecedent cultures and the Christian renovation of the values. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 174. Norris, “The apologists,” 36–37. Siker, “The second and third centuries,” 199. For a contrary view, see Beek, “Every Foreign Land,” 185.

Lieu's reduction of "meta-identity" to inclusivity, however, favouring Jewish elements, does not truthfully represent the concerns of the author. The work clearly diverges from known Jewish patterns.⁴⁹ And if the work was written in Alexandria, perhaps within the timeframe of *Letter of Barnabas* and definitely sharing in its opposition to Judaism,⁵⁰ Lieu's interpretation is even less plausible. After the Roman obliteration of the Jewish community in the Bar Kochba revolt, throughout the second century the Alexandrian church underscored itself as a Gentile community.⁵¹ Both *Diognetus* and *Letter of Barnabas* witness to this response. Labouring to convince the addressee to embrace the Christian ethos, the Disciple does not therefore mean that sort of inclusivity. As bearers of a new mindset, Christian believers, Stroumsa notes, "had to invent new parameters according to which they could fashion their own identity."⁵² David Runia agrees that in drawing upon Greek and Jewish cultural patterns, the early Christian ethos "cannot be reduced to its antecedents."⁵³ We shall soon discover that Diognetian "meta-identity" refers to a complex situation. It is not a matter of choosing between decontextualisation and inclusivity. It is a matter of both including and surpassing neighbourly parameters. Insofar as they are immanent, Christians adopt the space, the language, the culture, the food, and the clothing of their neighbours, but their ultimate point of reference is not of this world.

To all intents and purposes, the Disciple worked within the framework of the transdisciplinary logic of gathering and dividing—typical in Plato's discourse⁵⁴—corresponding to the logic of union and distinction that had

49 Edwards, "Apologetics," 551–552. Michael Heintz, "Μιμητής Θεοῦ in the Epistle to Diognetus," *J ECS* 12:1 (2004): 107–119, esp. 108–111, 117.

50 *Diognetus* 4. The anti-Judaism of *Letter of Barnabas* is well documented. Richard A. Norris, Jr, "The apostolic and sub-apostolic writings: the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 11–19, esp. 15. Siker, "The second and third centuries," 199. Joseph Trigg, "The Apostolic Fathers and Apologists," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 304–333, esp. 313–315.

51 Birger A. Pearson, "Egypt," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *Origins to Constantine*, ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 331–350, esp. 336–337.

52 Stroumsa, "Philosophy of the Barbarians," 341.

53 D.T. Runia, "The Pre-Christian Origins of Early Christian Spirituality," in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 2, ed. Pauline Allen et al. (Brisbane: Centre for Early Christian Studies, 1999), 11–24, esp. 11–12.

54 *Phaedrus* 265de. *Philebus* 16c–17a.

become the hallmark of later patristic orthodoxy.⁵⁵ Through the lens of this logic, Christians are inseparably different and dissimilarly familiar in regards to the world. Further consideration of the “astonishing and admittedly paradoxical condition” of Christian identity is required.

2.2 *Paradoxes of (Non)localisation*

According to the Disciple, worldly people and the new, third, godly Christian race share the same space, eat the same food, wear the same clothes, and speak the same language, but their lifestyles do not entirely overlap. The ethos of the world (“the thought and teaching of people concerned with many things”) is outwardly oriented and materialistic. The interiorised Christian mentality, however, does not draw upon “human opinion,” because its sources are divine.⁵⁶ A similar antithesis contrasts the “mystery” of Christian “godliness” and the “materialistic pursuit and arrogance of the Jews.”⁵⁷ Such contradistinctions do not betoken inclusivity.

A couple of centuries later, in the *Fifth Spiritual Homily* Ps-Macarius contrasts the vain thoughts of “the whole human race” and the ethos of “true Christians.”⁵⁸ Unlike the rest of humankind, seeking the things that are below, Christians are guided by the Holy Spirit to seek the goods that are eternal.⁵⁹ The homilist replays the teaching of the Disciple. Although the homilist refers to the Holy Spirit as the source of Christian wisdom, while the Disciple points to the Logos,⁶⁰ their messages concur perfectly.

Given its transcendent source, the Christian polity is theological in nature and divine, surpassing all worldly contexts, values, and customs. Whatever their geographical, historical, and cultural matrix, Christians, in seeking to be what they have to be, are not bound by the categories of space, time, ethnicity, culture, and language. They are a “new race” whose teacher and guide is the very creator and saviour of the universe.⁶¹ That makes them different from this

55 For this logic in patristic tradition, see Doru Costache, “Mapping Reality within the Experience of Holiness,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford University Press, 2015), 378–396; “Transdisciplinary Carats,” 151–154.

56 *Diognetus* 5.3. See Horst, “Secret Plan,” 165–168.

57 *Diognetus* 4.6. See Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 211.

58 “For by this true Christians differ from the whole human race.” *Spiritual Homilies* 5.4.58–59.

59 “Given their fellowship with and participation in the Holy Spirit, they dwell on a heavenly mindset and gaze upon the eternal goods.” *Spiritual Homilies* 5.4.60–62.

60 *Diognetus* 7.1–2. In his *The Book of the Laws* 59–61, Bardaisan, similarly, anchors Christian identity in the “law of the Messiah.”

61 *Diognetus* 7.1–2.

world and its people; that makes them free. Assimilated to God, they live above narrow frames of reference, being there and nowhere, local and cosmopolitan, and even atopic. Everywhere, they live according to the wide parameters of their own identity, overtopping the cliffs and falls of history, exactly as a later monastic adage would have it. Defining Christianity by the spirit in which it does things, the adage in question goes as follows: “what matters is not the place, *topos*; it is the manner, *tropos*.”⁶² Here, the Disciple’s discourse appears to have left its mark in monastic wisdom. In the footsteps of the early Christians, monks too must observe their ethos irrespective of their location.

Associating this monastic saying and the views of the Disciple, Ică notes the following about the Diognetian project:

The difference between them (sc. Christians) and the world rests on modality and not on spatiality or temporality; therefore it depends on *tropos*, not on *topos* or *chronos*. Christians are (located) neither elsewhere nor in another time. They actualise their status of God’s children through grace neither beyond here nor in the future, but in the here and now, although behaving in a different way from all others.⁶³

Taking his cue from this monastic saying, specifically the dialectic of *topos* and *tropos* to which he adds the temporal dimension, *chronos*, Ică deftly captures *Diognetus*’ balance between localisation and difference. These are two aspects of a perfect paradox. But he had something else to add to the matter. A page or so earlier he elaborated on the characterisation of Christians as neither merging with nor separating from their context. There he pointed out that they are both detached from and committed to any given place, time, or culture.⁶⁴ Thus, Ică elucidates the Diognetian paradox. Early Christian identity emerges irreducible to the either/or logic of Beek’s decontextualised Christianity or to Lieu’s culturally inclusive “meta-identity.” That said, Lieu was not insensitive to the paradox. Corresponding to Florovsky’s findings, she noticed that what I call the Christian condition of being-there-but-not-belonging-anywhere echoes scriptural passages such as John 8:23, 17:14–16, and 2 Cor 6:9–10.⁶⁵ In turn, R.G. Tan-

62 In modern Greek it runs as follows, Δεν είναι ο τόπος αλλά ο τρόπος. I am grateful to Nikos Livanos who alerted me to the patristic source of this saying, namely, John Chrysostom’s *Homilies to the People of Antioch* (*Ad populum Antiochenum*) 6.4 (PG 49, 87.26–27). Here is the relevant passage: ἵνα μάθῃς, ὅτι οὐχὶ τόπος, ἀλλὰ τρόπος σωτηρίαν φέρει (“this is for you to learn that it is not the place but the way that brings salvation”; trans. N. Livanos).

63 Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 22.

64 Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 20–21.

65 Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, 68. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 179–180. On the Pauline

ner detected here further contradictory reverberations—of the Stoic “universal world society” together with the Epicurean exigency to “live in hiding.”⁶⁶

Whether scriptural or philosophical in origin, or perhaps both, *Diognetus*’ depiction points to a tension best rendered in the statement that Christians “reside on earth but live (as though) in heaven.”⁶⁷ The sentence does not suggest a propensity for evasion. Sharing in God’s own state of being everywhere though never bound by space, early Christians, as Ică observed, exhibit their different (“heavenly”) manner of life in the here and now, not somewhere else. Marrou phrased this paradox in penetrating words: *La situation des Chrétiens dans le monde implique une synthèse d’immanence et de transcendance*.⁶⁸ On this note I must now turn to the other end of the spectrum, the aspect of difference.

2.3 *Transcendence*

Turning to the aspect of difference, the Disciple emphatically points out the existential strangeness of Christians through a cluster of paradoxes. Here are several examples.

Although they live in their own countries, they are like foreigners. They participate in everything as citizens but endure all things as strangers. Any foreign country is theirs and any homeland foreign.⁶⁹

The condition of being-there-but-not-belonging-anywhere is dramatically suggestive. Paraphrasing Lieu’s words, the early Christians appear as though crucified between their “internal self-identity” and their “external, observed identity.” External adaptation to local customs does not override their internal specificity. The passage therefore underscores the paradoxical character of their way of life. Of immediate interest is their resistance to negative trends within their environment; their transcendence as it were. Strangeness does not consist in a different citizenship. They are foreigners, strangers, aliens willingly, by not wishing to fit in at all costs. Ethical examples detail this difference, alluding to the customary charges of licentiousness. Christians are not what

affinities of *Diognetus*, see Marrou, “Commentaire,” 127–128. In his brief list of scriptural elements present throughout *Diognetus*, Trigg (“The Apostolic Fathers,” 315) makes no mention of Pauline passages.

66 Tanner, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” 502.

67 *Diognetus* 5.9. The phrase echoes Phil 3:20, also cited in *Spiritual Homilies* 5.3, 56–57, which makes even more clear the relation between these writings.

68 Marrou, “Commentaire,” 134. Cf. Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 21.

69 *Diognetus* 5.5.

their accusers believe them to be. They are not an abstinent sect, of course, but neither are they immoral. “They dwell in the flesh, but they do not live by the flesh.”⁷⁰ They marry and have children as do all, yet they neither destroy their offspring⁷¹ nor share their spouses.⁷² Their participation in the natural rhythms of life does not preclude the full affirmation of their strangeness—despite being misunderstood, marginalised, or even persecuted and put to death because of it.⁷³ Christian identity is inextricably linked to martyrdom.

Strangeness does not mean lack of engagement however. The Disciple continues by affirming that Christians contribute to the wellbeing of the world. They do abide by the established laws. But through their virtuous conduct, love, and compassion for all—by which they resemble God⁷⁴—they surpass worldly norms.⁷⁵

When she addressed the issue of exceeding worldly standards, Lieu refers only to *Diognetus* 5.7. She contends that the Christian virtues and the notion of heavenly life originated in the Hebrew ethos.⁷⁶ This interpretation concurs with her earlier idea that Christian “meta-identity” rehearses Judaic stances. We have seen above that, indeed, Christianity could not claim absolute novelty. But this does not mean that Christianity borrows from other cultures without transforming whatever it borrows. Furthermore, the Disciple’s proposal contains something uniquely Christian in essence though perhaps not in its form. Judaism and many other cultures speak of love, but the Christian sense of love knows no ethnic and religious limitations. Christian love means com-

70 *Diognetus* 5.8.

71 *Diognetus* 5.6. See Osiek, “The self-defining praxis,” 281.

72 *Diognetus* 5.7. See Anders-Christian Jacobsen, “The Apologists,” in *The Early Christian World* (2017), 547–564, esp. 556–561.

73 *Diognetus* 5.11–12, 14–17.

74 *Diognetus* 5.11. Cf. 10.6. In analysing chapter 10, Tanner (“The Epistle to *Diognetus*,” 504) ignores compassion as leading to the divine resemblance. The important nuances in *Diognetus* 10.6 have not escaped other scholars, however. Foster, “The Epistle to *Diognetus*,” 166. Horst, “Secret Plan,” 177–182. Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 21. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 101. For further notes on divine philanthropy and its Christian iteration, see Juan Ignacio Ruiz Aldas, “La recepción del concepto de *philanthropía* en la literatura cristiana de los dos primeros siglos,” *ScrTh* 42:2 (2010): 277–308. The author mentions *Diognetus* 8.7 and 9.2, but only with reference to God’s love for humankind (at 278, 295–296), thus ignoring the Christian emulation of this divine attribute espoused in chapter 10. Ruiz Aldas’ broader conclusions (at 303–305) on the equivalence of Christian love and divine philanthropy can be legitimately extrapolated for *Diognetus*.

75 νικῶσι (“vanquish”; *Diognetus* 5.10). See Marrou, “Commentaire,” 129–130. Tanner (“The Epistle to *Diognetus*,” 502–503) notices more Stoic echoes here.

76 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 180–182.

passion towards all. This notion transcends any narrow definitions of love for the neighbour. Accordingly, for the Disciple, Christians “love everybody” even though all people persecute them. They also “do good” to all even though they are punished as evildoers.⁷⁷ These assertions reach a climax in the portrait of the Christian benefactor as an imitator of God and as a “god” for the recipients of alms.⁷⁸ This portrait is not Jewish. It is Hellenistic, yes, but, as Ică and Russell have shown, no less Christian.⁷⁹ Interestingly, references to love and compassion—these hallmarks of Christian specificity—cannot be found in Lieu’s study of *Diognetus*. The absence of something as fundamental as the unbounded sense of love, typically Christian, might explain why she found obscurity and ambiguities—the clear signs of a forgery⁸⁰—in the Disciple’s articulation of Christian identity.

Christians are indeed unlocalised, alien, and peculiar. Their strangeness refers, however, to their moral standards and to their aptitude for loving all, regardless of who they are and how they live. In so presenting the situation, the Disciple put a positive spin on an otherwise disconcerting perspective. It is true that the world hates Christians the way the flesh hates the soul. But, as true disciples and philosophers, their way is to make spiritual progress—corresponding to the soul that betters itself by taking the ascetic path⁸¹—and so manifest the nobility of their lifestyle. The clear sign of this progress is the increase in numbers of believers, against all odds.⁸²

So we are led into the next topic, the task which Christians are called to perform in the world. Before that, I must pause to consider in closer detail the correspondence of the above depiction of Christian identity and Ps-Macarius’ *Spiritual Homilies*.⁸³

2.4 *An Anonymous Reiteration*

The Ps-Macarian *Fifth Spiritual Homily*, an anonymous writing from the second half of the fourth century, seems to iterate the same message as the Disciple, using a different vocabulary.⁸⁴ This and other shared matters might suggest the

77 *Diognetus* 5.11,16.

78 *Diognetus* 10.6. See Heintz, “Μιμητὴς Θεοῦ,” 113–117.

79 Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 21. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 101.

80 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 171, 189.

81 *Diognetus* 6.9.

82 *Diognetus* 6.9. See Marrou, “Commentaire,” 136–137.

83 For an overview of the *Spiritual Homilies*, see Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition*, ΟΤΜ (Oxford University Press, 2004), 7–71. *Diognetus* does not feature here as a possible source of Ps-Macarius.

84 This section of Chapter One is based on my paper, “Drawing Indoors the Line of Division:

author's awareness of *Diognetus*, regardless of the lexical divergence. Such difference could betoken a liberal rendition of *Diognetus*, perhaps from memory, if the author was indeed aware of this second-century source. Here is the relevant passage:

Although the crowds, similar to the people of the world, (believe that) the difference and distinction refers to forms and signs, the strangeness of Christians does not consist in outward forms and signs.⁸⁵

As in *Diognetus*, what differentiates Christians from worldly people is not their appearance. The sentence echoes the Disciple's efforts to highlight the familiar figure of Christians, the neighbourly outlook of their "external, observed identity," to paraphrase Lieu again. More emphatically than the Disciple, however, the sentence points inwards, where the actual difference is to be discerned. In so doing, it clarifies the problematic opening assertion of the same homily, which reminds us even more of *Diognetus*. Here is the passage.

The world of Christians is different, (which means that) their conduct, mindset, manner of speech, and activity happen to be different. Likewise, the conduct, the mindset, the manner of speech, and activity of people of this world are different.⁸⁶

At first glance this excerpt proposes that Christians and the "people of this world" live in parallel universes. This is not what the Disciple preached. But at close inspection the "different world" of Christians refers to their ethos—conduct, mindset, speech, and way of doing things. Their existential variance is confirmed, not a separate topography. Taken together, the two excerpts signify the complex situation of Christians who are indigenised without losing their distinctive trait, namely, the spirit by which they lead their lives. While in regards to the externals Christians display the common figure of their neighbourhood, their inner motivations, standards, and aspirations differ from their compatriots significantly. The perception of Ps-Macarius matches the Disciple's. It does so, however, by paying less attention to the aspect of context. Two assertions mark a more profound variation, requiring a closer look.

Letter to Diognetus and the Fifth Spiritual Homily," delivered for the APECSS Conference: Early Christian Responses to Conflict, held at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, 22–24 September 2017.

85 *Spiritual Homilies* 5.4.72–74.

86 *Spiritual Homilies* 5.1.2–4.

First, while the Disciple states that “Christians do not differ from the rest of people in regards to land,” the homily mentions the “different world of Christians.” This choice of words surprises. Given the supposed chronology of its writing—a time when Christians gained political freedom and social privileges—the homily exhibits an astonishing grimness. No expressions of triumph here, no outbursts of gratitude, no imperial panegyrics! Regardless of the subsequent clarification that the “different world” refers to existential distinctiveness, the phrase indicates a problem. A chasm still separated Christians from society, perhaps deeper than that experienced by *Diognetus*’ persecuted minority. The homilist refers to circumstances seemingly unknown to the Disciple. Whereas the latter addressed the opposition between Christians and the world in terms of an external conflict, Ps-Macarius transposes the conflict domestically, by dissociating “true Christians” from Christians captive to the worldly spirit. False Christians—or “the crowds” of the first passage—mistake outward manifestations for the substance of the Christian experience. They seem to exhibit the worldly worries and the extrinsic religiosity the Disciple loathed.⁸⁷ The significance of this shift from external to internal tensions cannot be determined without historical awareness. The homilist was familiar with various spiritual movements which sought refuge from “the world,” quite popular at the time.⁸⁸ Together with these movements, he reacted to the lowering of Christian standards from the reign of Constantine and his successors, when many Christians succumbed to the spirit of “the world.” He did so by recalibrating the contrast between Christians and non-Christians as the difference between true and false Christians.⁸⁹ Thus, the “different world of Christians” refers to the “true Christians,” committed to the Disciple’s criteria, which criteria are foreign to the worldly mindset. The homilist’s adjustment of the earlier discourse therefore addresses a dramatic shift in the Christian experience.

The second issue has to do with the different “manner of speech” of Christians, contrasting with the assurance of the Disciple that they speak the language of their neighbours. The statement of the homilist could mean an incomprehensible idiom. I propose that the phrase refers to a distinguished use of language, not a different tongue. Perhaps the best illustration of this sense is a

87 *Diognetus* 2–4.

88 Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 15–27.

89 This understanding reached western audiences through Augustine’s views on the divine and the worldly cities, whose territories overlapped yet whose boundaries remained axiologically, existentially, and ethically unmistakable. For the sources of Augustine’s idea, see Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities*, VCSup 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 93–102 (no reference to Ps-Macarius).

fifth-century monastic apophthegm about avoiding profanities: “never have I uttered a mundane word nor have I wished to hear one.”⁹⁰ If this is an echo of Ps-Macarius’ meaning, then the “manner of speech” is another way of marking the existential difference of Christians, not a foreign language. Either way, the homilist and the Disciple share the same conviction, bar their respective ways of phrasing it. This inference is consistent with the context of the statement. Shortly before iterating that the difference is not in outward manifestations, the homilist asserts that the speech and the conduct of Christians gives expression to “their thinking and mindset of the soul, which abides in the peace of Christ and the Spirit’s love,” a state of “peace, serenity, stability, and calm,” untroubled by vain thoughts or worldly fret.⁹¹ Spiritual attitudes such as stability and serenity do not belong with the “outward forms and signs” loved by the crowds. *Diognetus* presents similar qualities as interiorised values, in contradistinction with the superficiality of the outsiders fascinated by the look of things. The different “manner of speech,” therefore, manifests interior dispositions. The agreement and, very possibly, the connection of the two writings clearly emerges from behind the curtain of phraseological differences.

On this note, I must return to *Diognetus* for a closer consideration of the Christian ethos.

3 The Soul of the World

In addition to the paradoxical statements discussed above, *Diognetus* depicts the interaction between Christians and their context by means of a psychosomatic analogy. Marrou considers this analogy original and an inspiration to later centuries.⁹² In turn, Ică identifies here an entire social programme in a nutshell, whose outlines have been replicated, more or less successfully, throughout history.⁹³ This is the Disciple’s assertion that, “in the world, Christians are what the soul is in the body.”⁹⁴ This psychosomatic image could be taken in two ways.

First, it means that Christians are spread everywhere, the way the soul wholly permeates the body.⁹⁵ There is nothing alarming about this point, which iter-

90 *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*), Hierax 2 (PG 65, 232D).

91 *Spiritual Homilies* 5.4.58–71.

92 Marrou, “Commentaire,” 172–174.

93 Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 19.

94 *Diognetus* 6.1.

95 ἑσπαρται (“is scattered into”; *Diognetus* 6.2).

ates the theme of immanence, earlier discussed. But the same image also rehearses the matter of strangeness. Just as the soul cannot be confounded simply with the body, Christians do not indistinctly merge with the world they inhabit. “Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world.”⁹⁶ Despite their neighbourly localisation in this world, the existential difference remains. The topic of strangeness takes a dramatic turn, however, prefigured by the reference to Christians being punished for doing good.⁹⁷ It is at this juncture that a negative meaning of the analogy emerges. “Christians are within the world as though arrested in a prison.”⁹⁸ It has been suggested that the Disciple borrowed here the Pythagorean or Platonic image of the soul scattered through and held captive within the body. Scholars do not agree on the sources of this image.⁹⁹ What matters is the meaning of the analogy. Present in the world, Christians feel unwelcome because of the menace of persecution. The Disciple alludes to it in the metaphor of “the flesh (that) hates and wages war on the soul.”¹⁰⁰ The worldly flesh refuses its Christian soul. This negative sense of the analogy is consistent with the explicit statements that the world “hates Christians”¹⁰¹ and has them “persecuted everyday.”¹⁰²

This is not all there is to it. Second, the psychosomatic analogy also has a positive connotation. Building on the reference to the Christian unbounded love and compassion for all,¹⁰³ in regard to the broader society they fulfil a similar function to the soul vivifying the body. As the soul gives life to the body, Christian *diaspora* infuses life into the world, safeguarding the wellbeing of the society and contributing to the stability of the universe.¹⁰⁴ This bold pronouncement both clarifies and generalises on a cosmic scale the point that—their

96 *Diognetus* 6.3.

97 *Diognetus* 5.16.

98 *Diognetus* 6.7. See Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 21–22.

99 Foster (“The Epistle to Diognetus,” 165) and Tanner (“The Epistle to Diognetus,” 502–503) propose the Pythagorean and the Platonic traditions, against Marrou’s opinion that this is a Stoic stance. In a personal communication, David Runia, to whom I am grateful, confirmed the Platonic origin of this phrase taken verbatim from *Phaedo* 62b4. In turn, Marrou (“Commentaire,” 146–166) explores a series of Christian antecedents of this image—in the New Testament, the apologetic tradition, and the early Alexandrians.

100 *Diognetus* 6.5.

101 *Diognetus* 6.5.

102 *Diognetus* 6.9. Scriptural parallels can also be discerned here, such as Rom 8:36 and Ps 44:22 (LXX).

103 *Diognetus* 5.11.

104 αὐτοὶ δὲ συνέχουσιν τὸν κόσμον (“they preserve the world”; *Diognetus* 6.7). See Osborn, “The Apologists,” 526 and Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 21.

poverty notwithstanding—Christians enrich many.¹⁰⁵ They are marginalised and persecuted, but they are not resentful victims of those who hate them. They are the agents of the crucified Lord, working towards safeguarding and augmenting the world.

Another assessment of the Christian *diaspora* in the world—also functional and positive—occurs in Theophilus of Antioch's *To Autolycus*. Writing in the Disciple's timeframe, Theophilus views the Christian assemblies throughout the world as island havens in the stormy sea. They welcome all who need succour and salvation.¹⁰⁶ For both the Disciple and Theophilus therefore, living in *diaspora* is an opportunity to be of use to their fellow believers in the world. But the two analogies, of the soul and of the island havens, do not have the same suggestive power. Theophilus' islands welcome everyone who reach them, whereas the Disciple's soul purposely and proactively works to safeguard the world.

What matters is that, from the vantage point of the psychosomatic analogy, the paradoxical condition of Christian life culminates in the dialectic of difference from and activity within the world. Ică wonderfully captures both aspects.

The paradoxical citizenship of Christians unifies within the cruciform figure of an antinomy the interior and the exterior, the vertical and the horizontal, transcendence and immanence, heaven and earth, contemplation and action, mystical (perception) and (practical) involvement. The psychophysical image makes clear the impossibility of any disjunctive and unilateral options, which are equally 'heretical' and mutilating.¹⁰⁷

For Ică, the Christianity of *Diognetus* is complex, multidimensional, and holistic. It is not only a matter of dwelling in the world without being reducible to it. It is a matter of actively contributing to the betterment of the world as both society and earthly ecosystem. Marrou comments that Christians operate within the world like a divine principle or a providential agent,¹⁰⁸ *comme l'équivalent d'une âme cosmique*.¹⁰⁹ This vivifying function entails two nuances, one ontological and one practical.

105 *Diognetus* 5.13. The line echoes 2 Cor 6:10. See on this Marrou, "Commentaire," 137.

106 *To Autolycus* 2.14.15–22. A similar reference to Christians being spread "in every place and in all climates" appears in Bardaisan's *The Book of the Laws* 59–61, but without qualifications of the impact of their ubiquity.

107 Ică, "Biserică, societate și gândire," 21.

108 Marrou, "Commentaire," 138–141, 144–145.

109 Marrou, "Commentaire," 175.

Speaking of the task of Christians to preserve the world, the Disciple acknowledges that they infuse life in it the way a soul does with the body. Their own immanence sustains the cosmos into being. It has been suggested that Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165) is the source of this view. Justin believed that the prayers of Christians sustain the world in existence by postponing the final judgment.¹¹⁰ Origen picked up the same view.¹¹¹ Similar stances reverberate in the theological and ascetic literature of later centuries. Traces of this way of thinking can be identified in Sarapion of Thmuis' *Letter to the Monks*,¹¹² Gregory the Theologian's poem *Concerning His Own Life*,¹¹³ Barsanuphius' *Letter* 569,¹¹⁴ and John Moschus' *Spiritual Meadow*.¹¹⁵ Similarly, John Climacus views the "energy" of prayer as the "support of the world,"¹¹⁶ which very much evokes the Diognetan phrase, αὐτοὶ δὲ συνέχουσι τὸν κόσμον, earlier encountered.

All these sources refer to the cosmic impact of prayer and its accompanying ascetic endeavours. Could these examples be further patristic iterations of *Diognetus*, alongside Macarius' *Spiritual Homilies*? Are they exclusively echoes of Justin's point about prayer, or do they reflect a general sense of Christian presence in the world which the Disciple chanced to capture in a vibrant way? On his part, the Disciple does not seem interested in discussing the practical dimension, besides mentioning, very generally, that Christians love the world

110 Taking his cue from Marrou ("Commentaire," 174), Ică ("Biserică, societate și gândire," 21) refers to Justin's *Second Apology* 7.1. But see the broader context of this tradition in Marrou, "Commentaire," 146–171.

111 See William G. Rusch, "On Being a Christian—According to Origen," in *Origeniana Nona*, 319–325, esp. 321–323.

112 *Letter to the Monks* in Oliver Herbel, *Sarapion of Thmuis: Against the Manichaeans and Pastoral Letters*, ECS 14 (Strathfield, NSW and Banyo, QLD: St Pauls Publications and Centre for Early Christian Studies, 2011), 70. See also Ică, "Biserică, societate și gândire," 25 and Mario Baghos, "Ecosystemic Agency: Christ, His Saints, and John Chrysostom," in *John Chrysostom: Past, Present, Future*, 15–51, esp. 30–31.

113 Gregory the Theologian, *Concerning His Own Life* 583–591, in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Autobiographical poems*, ed. and trans. Carolinne White, CMC 6 (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54. Gregory points out that the presence of his growing Nicene community brought back to life the spiritually dead city of Constantinople. The supporters of John Chrysostom rehearsed the same position. See Baghos, "Ecosystemic Agency," 33–49.

114 Barsanuphius, *Letter* 569.24–39. See Baghos, "Ecosystemic Agency," 32.

115 See Doru Costache, "John Moschus on Asceticism and the Environment," *Colloquium* 48:1 (2016): 21–34, esp. 30–33.

116 κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, [προσευχὴ ἐστὶ] κόσμου σύστασις ("in regards to (its) energy/power/activity, (prayer is) the support of the world"; John Climacus, *Ladder of the Divine Ascent* 28, PG 88, 1129.5–7).

and have compassion towards all.¹¹⁷ Given the limited information available, it is impossible to give a conclusive answer. More important is the consensus of Barsanuphius (d. ca. 545), Climacus (d. ca. 649), Gregory, Justin, Moschus (d. ca. 634), Origen, and Sarapion (d. ca. 362), for whom prayer and the ascetic virtues represent the practical manner in which Christians impact on the world. This consensus casts light on the matter by suggesting *how* Christians might enrich and safeguard the world, understood as both society and cosmos. Admitting all that, there is still more to *Diognetus* than meets the eye.

Corresponding to Maximus the Confessor's (d. 662) tantalising statement that the saints are a grace bestowed upon the world,¹¹⁸ the Disciple does not clarify *how* Christians preserve the cosmos. I propose that, for the Disciple as for Maximus, the very immanence of Christians is the factor. The energy of their presence is grace at work in the world. Within the timeframe of the Disciple, Clement of Alexandria spoke of God's Logos making positive ripples throughout the infrastructure of the universe.¹¹⁹ This image may very well decipher the Disciple's enigmatic position. Let me explain. As previously discussed, he believes that Christians are like unto God. As such, they perform in a godlike fashion or the way Clement's Logos operates in the cosmos. If my interpretation holds, then the Disciple is a forerunner of later ascetic literature, where the presence of the saints—not their specific deeds—constitutes a mystical form of environmental agency.¹²⁰ This interpretation will appear suspicious in some quarters, but not where the anthropic status of the creation is accepted. Indeed, this interpretation resonates with the modern anthropic principle, which postulates the ontological impact of the human presence upon the universe.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Diognetus* 6.6.

¹¹⁸ *Difficulty* 41.3. See *Maximos the Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers—The Ambigua*, two vols., ed. Nicholas Constas, DOML (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 2104. See Costache, "Mapping Reality," 382.

¹¹⁹ See Costache, "Meaningful Cosmos," 118–119.

¹²⁰ Costache, "John Moschus," 25 n. 15, 30–31. Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology*, Foundations 4 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 95–154.

¹²¹ See Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 22. Contemporary scientists propose various other formulations of the principle. John D. Barrow, *The Constants of Nature: From Alpha to Omega—the Numbers that Encode the Deepest Secrets of the Universe* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 141–176. Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 16–20. Steven Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, updated and expanded tenth anniversary edn (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 128–131. Basarab Nicolescu, *Nous, la particule et le monde*, second edition (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 2002), 101–105. Trinh Xuan Thuan, *La mélodie secrète: Et L'Homme créa l'Univers* (France: Fayard, 1988), 287–288, 292–296.

Throughout this book we shall encounter more samples of anthropic thinking in the early Christian literature, with Chapter Seven entirely dedicated to this topic.

That Christians influence the world by prayer and ascetic undertakings is not as mystical an explanation as the notion of their ontological impact upon the universe. However, when one considers *Diognetus* in tandem with the teachings of Barsanuphius, Clement, Climacus, Gregory, Justin, Maximus, Moschus, Origen, and Sarapion the complementarity of these two perspectives is inescapable. The ontological ripples generated by the immanence of Christians in the world become practically manifest by concrete manifestations of altruism. The mystical dimension of their ontological impact does not exclude the practical side of their immanence; it complements it. This conclusion lends further substance to Ică's observation that Christianity aims to establish a "Kingdom of God which is both an inner reality and a socio-cosmic one."¹²²

I must now set aside the ambivalent sense of the "world" as both society and cosmos in order to focus on the latter. The above considerations regarding the ontological impact of Christians upon the universe ease the transition. But is there a worldview proper to *Diognetus*?

4 A Theological Representation of Reality

The ambiguous understanding of the "world" as both society and cosmos undoubtedly prevented the first Christian generations from developing an articulated worldview. In fact, their reservations regarding the "world" had more to do with the unfriendly society than with the cosmos as such. What matters is that the polysemous "world" facilitated a transfer of negative impressions from the human society onto the cosmos. An attentive reading of *Diognetus* reveals frequent illustrations of this transfer. Christians are arrested in the prison of the world.¹²³ They dwell in the world, but they are not from here.¹²⁴ In fact they belong to heaven.¹²⁵

This entire mindset is perfectly captured by a sentence with which I have not dealt before, "Christians sojourn in a perishable world, but await heavenly

¹²² Ică, "Biserică, societate și gândire," 19. Cf. *ibid.* 21.

¹²³ *Diognetus* 6.7.

¹²⁴ *Diognetus* 6.3.

¹²⁵ *Diognetus* 5.9.

imperishability.”¹²⁶ The line conveys more than the author’s belief that after this life Christians inherit an immortal one. Implicit in this statement is a dualistic system of the world which postulates—beyond the here and the now—the spiritual heavens above. The sentence also makes plain that things in the here and now are transitory, whereas heavenly realities are immutable. This dualistic representation of reality serves as foundation for an axiology that proclaims the superiority of things on high to the sublunar region. Accordingly, the elect have to transcend mundane realities in order to inherit a more blessed state, beyond the flow of time and change.

Occasionally, this outlook of the present life emerges by way of negative references to the “world.” A statement in the prologue spells out that Christians “despise the world.”¹²⁷ True, “world” can be taken to refer to the vile and immoral human society, but this is not the Disciple’s only way of talking about it. Just a few lines later, he launches a “philosophical” attack on Gentile culture, not from theological, religious, or ethical presuppositions. So he refers to the “perishable matter” of which the idols are made.¹²⁸ What troubles him is not the polytheism and the idolatry of popular religion. It is the fact that the statues representing deities are made of base matter and therefore count low in the accepted order of things. No ambiguity there. The “world” to which he refers in this context is the material cosmos, not an evil society. What all Christians despise is the ephemeral nature of the material creation. An existential concern is also at play behind the author’s reasoning about idolatry. Instead of progressing to a loftier condition through aspiring to things on high, idolatrous Gentiles became what they worshiped—material, not spiritual beings.¹²⁹ This judgment indicates the same critical assessment of the “world.”

The ontological negativity of these stances is inescapable, making one wonder whether this backdrop allows for any positive assessments of reality. Soon it will become obvious that these stances actually sit in stark contrast with the Disciple’s profound convictions. But, before I move on from here, I must review a couple of passages where he raised objections pertaining to cosmology, against foreign opinions and practices.

The first objection refers to the Jewish respect for astronomical cycles and cosmic phenomena as a backdrop for holding festivals and rituals.

126 *Diognetus* 6.8.

127 *Diognetus* 1.

128 φθαρτὴ ὕλη (*Diognetus* 2.3).

129 *Diognetus* 2.5.

Attending to the stars and the moon, they make observance of the months and the days. They also discriminate the dispensations of God and the changes of the seasons for their own needs, some for festivities, some for grief.¹³⁰

The passage considers the astronomical setting of Jewish religious practices. Customs related to cosmic religiosity do not amount to genuine devotion. The Disciple finds it problematic to discern sacred and profane times. In so doing, he goes against the tide. The habit of discerning sacred times is common to the overall religious experience of humankind, being enthusiastically appropriated by later Christian generations. The Disciple's opposition undoubtedly originates in his view that God's presence and the immanence of Christians mark the spacetime continuum. Nevertheless, as he does not say clearly what he means by Christians preserving the cosmos in existence, he does not disclose his reasons for criticising religious customs either.

Another possible reason for opposing cosmic religiosity might be the desire of the author to ascertain Christian freedom from the forces of nature. This possibility finds confirmation in the belief that Christians transcend all boundaries.¹³¹ Here, he may have relied on Ignatian soteriology. Ignatius depicted a wholly renovated creation where Christian freedom was no longer threatened by cosmic rhythms. I discuss his views in Chapter Two. Closer to the Disciple's intentions, Origen proposed a complex theory of human freedom, to which I turn in Chapter Three.

A more immediate reason for objecting to Jewish religious rites can be inferred from an earlier stance, unrelated to astronomy, but associated with the doctrine of creation. There, the Disciple rejects the custom of marking some things as good and others as useless by discriminating between clean and unclean animals. His approach draws upon the conviction that God created all things, and that all things, therefore, are good and useful.¹³² As we shall see in Chapter Seven, this topic recurred throughout the early Christian centuries. Connecting the Disciple's views of animals and the cosmic rhythms, his thought appears in a more positive light. As the entire creation is good and useful—including space and time—there is no point in marking sacred times against profane times. The views of the Disciple are not pessimistic therefore. What he rejects is the supposed ignorance of the Jews concerning the space-time continuum, together with their inadequate use of the creation.

¹³⁰ *Diognetus* 4.5.

¹³¹ *Diognetus* 5.5; 7.4–5.

¹³² *Diognetus* 4.2.

The second objection refers to a philosophical representation of the world. Because of their theological ineptitude, ancient cosmologists identified God with the fundamental elements of nature, so perceived by the available sciences. Here is the relevant passage:

Some said that God is fire, ... others water, and others another of the elements that God made. And so, if any of these discourses are accepted, then, in like manner, any other things created can be proclaimed god.¹³³

This is no longer about working out religious practices guided by astronomical occurrences. The excerpt addresses the ancient cosmology of the *physiologoi*, the ancient physicists. As the Disciple reads the available scientific hypotheses, reflection on the fundamental elements led the ancients to identifying the divine with the material reality. This identification was contrary to the Christian doctrine of creation. But the danger of pantheism—if this is what the Disciple intimates—is no reason to develop a negative worldview. One needs instead to foil the amalgamation of natural philosophy and pagan theology. Accordingly, the author opposes what he considers a bad theology that led to the misinterpretation of reality. Nothing created is divine by nature. The possibility of an ontological fusion between God and the creation is out of the question. The elements are God's creation, not God; God and the creation are altogether different. Several paragraphs earlier, the Disciple points to this difference by describing the cosmos as material only. By making no reference to invisible creation, there, he emphasises God's invisibility.¹³⁴

A clearer proof of the ontological gap is that God transcends necessity whereas the cosmos cannot escape it. *Diognetus* clarifies this matter in a passage which counteracts another aspect of false religion:

The one who has created the heaven, the earth, and all that are within these, the one who provides for all of us what we need, is in no need of any of these things that he provides to those who believe that can offer him (sacrifices).¹³⁵

133 *Diognetus* 8.2–3. David Runia pointed out in a personal communication that, here, the author alludes to the common doxographical accounts of God's nature, e.g. Aetius, *De placitis* 1.7. I am grateful for this information.

134 *Diognetus* 7.2.

135 *Diognetus* 3.4.

The widespread religious practice of sacrifices implies another misrepresentation and misuse of the world. Christians must not surrender to it. God created all things and offered everything as a gift to humankind. Nothing can be sacrificed to God who created all things out of love, providing our race with whatever it needs for life. God's love for humankind is manifest in the creation of the world.¹³⁶ And God's love for the creation is manifest through the revelation of the Son of God, the creator of all, in the world.¹³⁷ The Disciple's rejection of sacrifices draws on a soteriological iteration of the doctrine of creation—a cosmic soteriology—which is the theological foundation of his ultimately optimistic worldview.

Together with the negative stances analysed above, these objections reveal that the cosmological ambiguity of the author is not caused by the universe itself. The cosmos is a divine creation and as such not to be despised. What determined his ambiguity were circumstantial factors related to the culture of the time, the broader human society—perceived as immoral and oppressive—and, last but not least, the religious misinterpretation and misuse of the world.

I must now turn to the representation of reality proper.

5 The Diognetian Worldview

The passages analysed above might be foiling misinterpretations and misuses of the world, but, as we have seen, ultimately they denote a positive appraisal of the universe as creation. The Disciple's vantage point in cosmology—the doctrine of creation—is theological. Considered through this lens, his cosmos is rationally organised and meaningful. As we read elsewhere in *Diognetus*, "God, the master and demiurge of all, created all things and decided on their order."¹³⁸ This statement about God's involvement in the universe bespeaks the world's connection with the creator, together with its own ordered constitution. It is as much about the creation as it is about the creator. It shows that, being divinely conditioned from the outset, the universe is an ordered reality. This is another way of affirming the goodness of the world.

But the divine conditioning of the cosmos does not refer only to its beginning. Another form of conditioning is the Lord's incarnation, which restores the

¹³⁶ *Diognetus* 10.2.

¹³⁷ *Diognetus* 7. In referring to God the Father and the Son as creator agents, the Disciple iterates a widespread early Christian view. See Paul M. Blowers, "Doctrine of Creation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, 906–931, esp. 907.

¹³⁸ *Diognetus* 8.7.

meaningful order of the universe¹³⁹ once humankind broke it. Restored order is now obvious everywhere—we shall soon discover—through the harmonious working of the created beings. The spurious part of the treatise echoes this message when it states that due to the incarnation “the seasons gather together and join the cosmos,” in the harmony of its order.¹⁴⁰ In presenting the incarnation as a cosmic event, the Disciple and the author of the last two chapters of *Diognetus* may have echoed Paul’s Col 1:15–20 as well as the Starhymn of Ignatius (see Chapter Two below), both elaborating on what earlier I called cosmic soteriology.

There is, however, another aspect to the Disciple’s worldview. Cosmic order does not exist only due to God’s creative will and saving economy. It does so also because God meant the world as a gift to humankind,¹⁴¹ adapted to our flourishing within it. This is an anthropic way of thinking which the Disciple shared with Theophilus.¹⁴² The anthropic perspective came across already in his point on the impact of Christian immanence upon the world. In what follows I discuss two more passages, briefly mentioned earlier, of which the first contains a cosmological summary, and the second returns to the anthropic perspective. It is with their analysis that I bring this section to a close.

The following excerpt offers a relatively detailed description of the cosmos together with the assertion that the saviour sent to humankind is the creator of all things. Once again, the Disciple’s cosmology emerges within a theological framework—specifically the reference to “the truly invisible God, the ruler and maker of all” who dispatched to the believers “the Truth, namely, the holy and incomprehensible Logos.”¹⁴³ Here is the passage in question:

This is the one whom (God) sent to them: the very artisan and maker of all, who made the heavens and confined the sea within its boundaries (ὅροι), whose mysteries all the elements faithfully observe, from whom the sun received the measures (μέτρα) of the daily paths which it pursues, the one whose command to show forth the moon obeys at night, whom the stars that follow the path of the moon obey—the one who organised, defined, and connected all things (ὃ πάντα διατέταχται καὶ διώρισται

139 *Diognetus* 7.

140 *Diognetus* 12.9.

141 *Diognetus* 10.2.

142 For Theophilus’ relevant views, see Andrew Louth, “The Six Days of Creation According to the Greek Fathers,” in *Reading Genesis after Darwin*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson (Oxford University Press, 2009), 39–55, esp. 43. For an overview of Theophilus’ cosmology, see Louth, “Basil and the Fathers,” 69–71.

143 *Diognetus* 7.2.

καὶ ὑποτέτακται), namely, the skies and things celestial, the earth and the earthly things, the sea and things aquatic, (as well as) fire, air, the abyss, (in other words,) things on high, things in the depths, things in between.¹⁴⁴

The author introduces his complex cosmography in traditional fashion, against the backdrop of a theological narrative about the creator and saviour of the universe. The excerpt alludes to scriptural passages such as John 1:1–5, 9–14 and again Col 1:15–20, where the theological discourse on divine activity also refers to the cosmos in more or less detail. Nevertheless, while speaking of the identity of the saviour as Logos creator, this passage sketches a fairly comprehensive map of the world. In so doing, this map extends far beyond its New Testament antecedents. In what follows first I look at the theological framework and then I turn to cosmology.

The theological dimension of the passage, in its context, focuses on the Logos, the creator of the universe, who came into the world to save and enlighten the creation. In referring to Christ as “Truth,” the context alludes to the divine activity of revelation. The topic of revelation coheres with the earlier statement on the divine wellspring of the Christian heavenly mindset.¹⁴⁵ He who brought about the revelation is no secondary agent, but the divine creator of the universe;¹⁴⁶ hence the high Christian standards.¹⁴⁷

The theological message does not end here; it points to a different aspect altogether, the worth of the cosmos as divine creation. In sketching the activity of the creator Logos, provident carer, saviour, and factor of revelation, the passage discloses something important about the ordered universe. It is a good world. This ordered totality of “things on high, things in the depths, things in between,” is good, functioning within the parameters set by divine wisdom and activity. The phrase ὃ πάντα διατέτακται καὶ διώρισται καὶ ὑποτέτακται (“who organised, defined, and connected all things”) depicts a universe which works as the Logos conditions it to do from within. Above all, the world is good as it maintains direct contact with its centre, the Logos—a topic Justin addressed within the same timeframe¹⁴⁸—from whom all things draw the power to work

144 *Diognetus* 7.2.

145 *Diognetus* 5.3.

146 “He did not send someone like a servant who brings news to people—or an angel, or a ruler, or one who manages things on earth, or one who administers, as we think, things in heavens.” *Diognetus* 7.2.

147 “What was given to them is not an earthly discovery (ἐπίγειον εὑρημα). What they attentively observe as worthwhile is not mortal thinking (θνητὴν ἐπινόαν). Nor have they been entrusted with managing human mysteries (ἀνθρωπίνων μυστηρίων)” (*Diognetus* 7.1).

148 See Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 22–25.

together and in an orderly way. Given its connection with the centre the entire creation is theologically meaningful, “faithfully observing the mysteries” of the Logos. The theological core of the passage confirms the positive appraisal of the world earlier encountered.

Turning to the Disciple’s representation of reality, the passage sketches a complex, layered universe, from the astronomical cosmos down to the fundamental elements. Between these strands of reality unfold created beings such as the sun, the moon, and the stars, the earth, the sea, and everything that inhabits the earth and the waters. This detailed depiction refers implicitly to three major regions: the grand scale of the astronomical macrocosm, the small scale of the elementary microcosm, and the physical objects populating the earthly environment. The last phrase of the passage—“things on high, things in the depths, things in between”—of doxographical resonance,¹⁴⁹ summarises this triple-tiered representation.

There is something very impressive about this worldview. It is a physicalist description of reality (hence my use of “sky” instead of “heaven,” here and elsewhere in this book), not prone to seeking the back of beyond, as it were. Accordingly, it avoids any references to the invisible realms which both the Platonic tradition and the Scriptures assiduously contemplate. Echoing Aristides, the Christian apologist who skilfully blended the Christian theology of creation and the available physics,¹⁵⁰ the Disciple’s theological worldview includes the received description of the material world. In adopting this approach, he confirms his statements regarding the neighbourly outlook of Christians. They do not only live in the same place as members of the same society and as bearers of the same culture. They inhabit the same world, made of the elements known to the ancients and, furthermore, structured according to the accepted canons of proportion, order, and harmony—see the “boundaries” (ὅροι) and the “measures” (μέτρα) of the “organised, defined, and connected” universe. But the passage tacitly refers to matters from outside the classical tradition.

Specifically, the familiar cosmography outlined above includes scriptural echoes and pointers to a corresponding theology. Echoing the Genesis narrative of creation and the Psalms,¹⁵¹ and perhaps also drawing from Clement

149 Cf. Aetius, *De placitis* 3.praef. I am grateful to David Runia for this reference.

150 Aristides, *Apology* 1.1–4.

151 See LXX Ps 18, 103, 148. Genesis and the Psalms are the favourite sources of the patristic doctrine of creation. Blowers, *Drama*, 189–198. Andrew Louth, “The Fathers on Genesis,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans et al., SVT 152 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 561–578, esp. 561, 568; “Basil and the Fathers,” 69–75.

of Rome's *First Letter to the Corinthians*,¹⁵² the Disciple ascribes to providence and God's Logos the state of the ordered universe. The permeating divine wisdom and activity condition natural phenomena, determining the parameters of their existence. The divine command establishes the boundaries of the waters and the cosmic cycles. It is God "who organises, defines, and connects all things," and whom the creation obeys. This divinely grounded cosmos must be the background image against which the Disciple thinks about the impact of Christian immanence. The impact of the "soul of the world"—that is, Christians who live and work in godlike manner—corresponds to the divine activity in the universe. Conversely, Christian cosmic agency makes manifest the discrete divine presence at work throughout the creation.

In this light, the Disciple offers a theologically interpreted cosmology, a scripturally anchored bridge between the Christian worldview and the available sciences. From the vantage point of this representation the cosmos of ancient science is indeed so, an ordered reality, because of the wisdom of a transcendent rational principle, God's Logos, the provident creator of all. The same principle reveals in the hearts of believers saving truths about human destiny.¹⁵³ This logocentric cosmology reminds us of the Disciple's Alexandrian contemporary, Clement,¹⁵⁴ whose relevant input I discuss in Chapter Two. As in Clement, this combination of revelational, soteriological, and cosmological perspectives engenders further connotations. It asks us to consider the universe as a means of divine revelation, and revelation itself as intrinsically connected with the mystery of creation. I shall concern myself with the topic of creation as revelation in the next chapter, but also throughout this book.

It also asks us to connect the theological representation of reality and the Christian way of life. Corresponding to other early Christian authors,¹⁵⁵ the Disciple had an aptitude for statements synthesising the faith and the ethos of the church. Take, for example, the following excerpt, where he summarises an entire theological worldview, with anthropology and cosmology blending in a soteriological narration of the meaning of life. Here is what the Disciple has to say, in an almost credal fashion:

152 *First Clement* 20. On *First Clement's* notion of cosmic order, see Barker, *Creation*, 121, 286.

153 "But the truly invisible God, the ruler and maker of all, established and affixed in the hearts of people the holy and incomprehensible Truth and Logos from heavens" (*Diognetus* 7.2).

154 *Exhortation* 1.5.2; 1.7.3; 6.68.5.

155 John Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 1:83–84, 90–91. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, second edn, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 86–105. For the inclusion of the doctrine of creation in the early Christian creeds, see Blowers, *Drama*, 67–78.

God loves human beings. He created the cosmos for them and to them he subjected all things on the earth. He gave them reason and mind. To them only he apportioned the skyward gaze (οἷς μόνοις ἄνω πρὸς οὐρανὸν ὁρᾶν ἐπέτρεψεν). It is they whom he moulded out of his own image, and to them did he send his only-begotten Son. To them he promised the heavenly kingdom, which he will give to those who love him.¹⁵⁶

Echoing the position of Aristides once more,¹⁵⁷ the cosmos is not an involuntary happening, but has a purposeful existence. It is the manifestation of God's love for humankind, made for us. Its condition is inherently anthropic by divine design. Here, the anthropic condition of the creation means that all things on earth are made for a human race that, due to its reason, has the capacity to rule over the ecosystem. But human beings are not only earthly overlords—a topic developed in later centuries, as I show in Chapter Seven. They possess the aptitude to gaze skywards (see ἄνω πρὸς οὐρανὸν ὁρᾶν), broadening their horizon to comprehend the universe. In so doing, they consider all things in a perspective which far exceeds their immediate frame of reference, their earthly milieu. This could be an allusion to Aristotle's view that humanity has rational faculties which are lacking in other lifeforms.¹⁵⁸ That said, by mentioning the human call to contemplate the heavens, the Disciple intended more than just to draw a line between reasoning and unreasoning things.

The verb ἐπέτρεψεν, which I translated by "apportioned," suggests a lot, a task, a mandate for humankind, namely, to measure its immediate challenges against the broader picture of reality. In all its affairs, humankind is to proceed holistically, respecting the place of each and every thing within the whole. But given that the appointment is to look upwards, contemplatively, this mandate has a richer significance. To look upwards signifies that the ultimate point of reference is the transcendent God, in whose image humankind is made. This entails learning from God how to rule over the world lovingly, in a godlike, caring fashion. The supreme exemplification of this approach is the paradigmatic image of God's Son and Logos who loves the world by saving it. The human mandate signifies, moreover, to seek the heavenly kingdom promised to all who love God and God's Son. Humankind must take care of the creation without losing sight of the heavenly reward. The holistic framework within

¹⁵⁶ *Diognetus* 10.2.

¹⁵⁷ Aristides, *Apology* 1.1–4.

¹⁵⁸ Klaus Corcilius, "Faculties in Ancient Philosophy," in *The Faculties: A History*, ed. Dominik Perler, OUP (Oxford University Press, 2015), 19–58, esp. 43.

which this mandate must be accomplished is not only cosmological—that is, the contemplation of nature and the care taking of the creation—but also theological and eschatological, culminating in divine participation. This complex framework—cosmological, theological, and eschatological—may baulk a modern reader as a contrived assemblage of perspectives. Truth be told, the Disciple does not attempt to connect them explicitly. But the fact that he weaves together these perspectives within the same narrative shows that in his mind they are mutually inclusive.

An important outcome of this framework is that it reveals the correspondence of the general mandate of humankind, suggested here, with the special task of Christians mentioned in the sixth chapter. The task of Christians to preserve the cosmos brings to a concreteness the general mandate of humankind to rule over and to make good use of the creation. But together with the fact that they overlap, these tasks have deeper common roots: both refer to a transcendent criterion, God's own way of doing things, discerned through contemplation. These connections bring to the fore the consistency of the Disciple's thinking in matters pertaining to caring for the world, God's own creation. They also anticipate later developments—discussed throughout this book—in terms of the practical outcomes of contemplative exercises.

Before concluding, I return briefly to the dissonance between the negative and the positive stances of *Diognetus* in regard to the “world.” Considering the above, the negative appraisal concerns a hostile society which both misinterprets reality and persecutes the church. This appraisal stems, furthermore, from the desire of Christians to draw a line between their own criteria and the customs of a society disposed towards moral laxity. Given his commitment to a robust doctrine of creation and natural contemplation, however, generally the Disciple displayed a positive approach to the cosmos and its scientific representation. This positive stance was the basis of his notion, articulated in the sixth chapter, that Christians are called to preserve the cosmos—a call which fulfils the overall human task to make good use and to take care of the world.

6 Conclusions

Diognetus is an invaluable source for the interaction of the early church with its social and cultural context, including the articulation of its worldview.

For the author, Christians are good neighbours and participate in the everyday dealings of contemporary society, but their life is not happily uneventful. As they work hard to maintain their distinctiveness, they must engage the society

in loving and creative ways. And, given the hostility shown to them, balancing these two dimensions—that is, preserving identity and social engagement—is not easy, abrading the sensitivities of believers. An impasse looms large on the horizon. The facile solution would be either isolation from society or being swallowed up by it. However, the Disciple proposes a wise way out of this impasse. His complex solution is anchored in scriptural, traditional, and philosophical sources. As agents of the crucified Logos and called to imitate Christ in all things, Christians are not against the world, even when the world is against them. They inhabit a given context without exclusively belonging to it, thus appropriating the status of resident aliens. Only as foreigners—paradoxically—can they actively contribute to the stability, integrity, and well-being of the world. That is what they actually do by “being in the world,” by virtue of a divine mandate. In sketching this solution, the Disciple refuses to dissolve the paradoxes of the Christian experience, choosing to represent it through a cruciform wisdom.¹⁵⁹ *Pace* Lieu, there is nothing “remarkably opaque” here.¹⁶⁰

This complex construct of the Christian condition in the world matches the Disciple’s equally complex representation of reality.

As long as the “world” means both cosmos and society, and inasmuch as it is viewed through the lens of a decadent culture and an oppressive society, its negative depictions are unavoidable. So perceived, the world is a repugnant place, a prison, a place of suffering, despicable; a space to leave behind rather than to live in. But when it is considered from the vantage point of Christ’s luminous example¹⁶¹ and acknowledged as God’s creation, cosmic reality discloses its harmonious structure, its divinely set rhythms and balance, its meaningfulness and purposefulness. It is a place where humankind, including Christians, could feel at home and thrive. Against this backdrop, the Disciple offers a precise, albeit succinct, description of the cosmos in which can be recognised an assortment of elements, from ancient cosmography and physics to scriptural and early Christian motifs. This interdisciplinary description is an important step towards making the cosmos an object of Christian contemplation, as it happened in the next couple of centuries.

More important for him, however, is the fact that, understood from the combined viewpoint of the doctrine of creation, revelation, and soteriology, the universe is made for humankind. Also, that humanity must approach the world

159 Ică, “Biserică, societate și gândire,” 21.

160 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 182–183.

161 Christ was “sent with kindness and gentleness ... to save ... and to persuade, not to coerce” (*Diognetus* 7.4).

according to the transcendent paradigm of divine love and care. This is what Christian agency accomplishes on earth, “being in the world.” Here, the Disciple gives an important lesson, namely, that Christians cannot ignore the world. Their experience is inseparable from the cosmic saga. Other early Christian theologians shared in this realisation. To some of their contributions I turn in what follows.

Cosmic Harmony

The valuable insights of the Disciple into the nature of the cosmos are overshadowed, we have seen above, by the dramatic vista of Christians living within a hostile world. In turn, the authors whose contributions I shall be analysing here, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Clement, and Athanasius, consider the cosmos through a polychrome lens that reveals its familiar and agreeable traits.¹ The dramatic hues disappear, at least in certain instances, making room for the image of a welcoming world. To use an analogy from modern culture, the hideous, reeling, and threatening stars above of H.P. Lovecraft's story "Polaris" transform into William Paul Young's awesome starry skies in *The Shack* or, better, into Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* river of stars that feels like a cosy shelter.² This brighter depiction must have originated in the pastoral desire of the authors to alleviate the anxieties of their fellow believers. What else conditioned this positive strategy is a profound feature of the human psyche—its anthropomorphic bias—which prompts it to represent reality according to its own measure. No wonder the early Christians surmised their representation of reality from their own experience. Accordingly, the relevant works compare the cosmos and its phenomena to church life. This occurrence is far from unique in history. As David Christian states, "creation stories, too, arise from a relationship between particular human communities and the universe as these communities imagine it."³ This approach endured through the centuries.

Closer to us, for example, Vladimir Lossky iterates that the universe was created as church and that it is meant to array itself gradually as communion.⁴ The dynamism of the evolutionary cosmos—especially its soaring complexity⁵—amounts to advancing towards a congregational unity of sorts. It is true that Lossky draws from a range of patristic sources, but he presents this idea as a generally acknowledged given, with no caveat that beauty, as the saying goes, is

1 This chapter reutilises material from two of my studies, "Worldview and Melodic Imagery" and "Meaningful Cosmos," which it presents in a completely new and expanded form.

2 H.P. Lovecraft, "Polaris," in *The Fiction: Complete and Unabridged* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), 33. Tim Winton, *Cloudstreet* (Penguin Books, 2007), 114. William Paul Young, *The Shack* (Los Angeles, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), 109–110.

3 Christian, *Maps of Time*, 6.

4 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 111–113.

5 Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 241.

in the eye of the beholder. His representation of the cosmos as church depends on the convictions of faith and cannot expect approval from all quarters. When, however, this representation is introduced as pertaining to the faith, the cosmos as communion is an illuminating perspective and a suitable rendition of the early Christian worldview. It corresponds to such Pauline passages as Col 1:13–20 and Eph 1:7–10; 2:14–16, together with other traditional sources currently making the object of temple theology.⁶ In Paul, salvation amounts to the unification of humankind and the universe under the church's head, Christ himself. Already here, therefore, faith presupposes that *cosmos* is called to be *church*—the communion in Christ of the saved, human and nonhuman alike. This church-minded worldview makes complete sense to a church-centred audience.

What the early Christian theologians whose contributions I examine here realised is that occasional readers, unfamiliar with the church, could not grasp their way of depicting reality. This realisation compelled them to deploy cultural instruments which help to communicate these views. Their strategy is therefore versatile. We have seen in Chapter One, briefly, that the Disciple's contemporary, Aristides, presented a rigorous cosmology. Similarly, the Disciple himself depicted the universe in broad physical brushstrokes. But another approach the relevant authors adopted was borrowing from the broader culture musical terms and images which resonated with their church experience. Accordingly, they captured cosmic harmony in terms of a musical worldview, liturgical in nature. This representation of reality was part of the process by which Christians familiarised themselves with the world, and by which the world became a Christian *oikoumene*, a home, or a church for that matter. This process of mutual adjustment—not an easy square to circle—continued well into the fifth century, as we shall find out in the rest of this book. What matters for now is that this melodious universe was no longer the hostile world of the apprehensive Diognesian community. It was the familiar, ordered universe of God's creation engaged in liturgical praise.

Of the writers on which I shall focus here, especially the Alexandrians contemplated a functionally structured, ordered, and meaningful universe, which bespeaks the providential activity of the Logos. To depict the cosmos, they consistently employed musical terms informed by the liturgical experience of the church. True, they borrowed from Ignatius and Irenaeus, genuine Christian pioneers of representing reality in melodious guise, but their own achievements

6 Relevant sources are reviewed in Barker's *Creation* and her other contributions to temple theology. See her personal page, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/Default.htm> (accessed 30 April 2018).

exceeded their antecedents. Theirs is a poetic narrative of a God who sings the universe into being, and of a universe which—mirroring the praises of the congregation—intones a godly song. This narrative permeates Clement's *Exhortation* and Athanasius' *Gentiles*. Both writings belong to the apologetic genre, but modified, keyed catechetically to attract the hesitant within the church.⁷ Both focus on the nexus of Gospel and culture, also showing an interest in cosmology. The many links between these writings illustrate the coherence of the Alexandrian tradition.

Before I turn to these Alexandrian treatises, however, I examine the use of melodic imagery in Ignatius and Irenaeus. In my analysis I shall also make references to Clement of Rome, with a view to showing that the two Alexandrian theologians inherited the contributions of earlier authors from other geographical and cultural spaces. From this point of view, the coherence of the Alexandrian tradition confirms the coherence of the mainstream early Christian tradition.

But first, let me remark a feature of the early Christian worldview that usually goes unnoticed by scholars interested in exploring the cosmos as “another scripture.”⁸ As a rule, they probe the ancient Christian notion of the creation as hierophany or channel of divine revelation—the “book of nature”—which requires exegetical decoding. Accordingly, they analyse patristic passages which compare Scripture and the cosmos from the viewpoint of their theological meaning. They do not, however, pay attention to musical images. In two earlier studies I myself considered the cosmos as “another scripture,” without noticing the significance of melodic references.⁹ Now, however, I argue that the musical imagery which our authors employ is equally important in terms of

7 That *Exhortation* and *Gentiles* are two somehow odd apologies, meant for the church audiences and not for outsiders, has not escaped scholars. John Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 2.1:168. Uta Heil, “Athanasius als Apologet des Christentums: Einleitungsfragen zum Doppelwerk *Contra Gentes* / *De Incarnatione*,” in *Three Greek Apologists: Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* / *Drei griechische Apologeten: Origenes, Eusebius und Athanasius*, ed. Anders-Christian Jacobsen and Jörg Ulrich, ECCA 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 159–187, esp. 178–182. E.P. Meijering, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 154–155. E.P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 107–108. Alexei V. Nesteruk, *The Sense of the Universe: Philosophical Explication of Theological Commitment in Modern Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 48. Daniel L. Worden, “Clement's *Protreptikos* to the Greeks: An Exhortation for the Lapsed Hellenistic Believers to Return to God,” *SP* 77 (2014): 43–57.

8 Blowers, *Drama*, 316–322. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*. Van Der Meer and Mandelbrote (eds), *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions*, vol. 1.

9 See Costache, “Meaningful Cosmos,” 107–130 and “Colocviul fără Sfârșit: Rațiunea de a fi a cre-

presenting the creation as divine revelation. The significance of this approach will become clearer in Chapters Three and Five, where, against the backdrop of contemplative approaches, I discuss the cosmos as a theological school whose students learn how to read nature.

1 Ignatius

Clement and Athanasius are not the first early Christian authors who made use of musical imagery theologically, in order to interpret the cosmos as harmoniously structured. They worked within a tradition. Before I look at two patristic antecedents of their contributions, Ignatius and Irenaeus, it is noteworthy that on this front—as in many other matters—Christian theologians found a precursor in Philo.¹⁰ He had a vital interest in liturgical music—including synagogal choirs—whence he gathered some of his suggestive images of the ordered cosmos.¹¹ I cannot follow this connection in detail. But since his contributions informed and inspired the early Christian theologians considered here, throughout my analysis I point to Philo and the relevant scholarship whenever appropriate. On this note, I turn to Ignatius and Irenaeus' contributions.

The cosmos and its representations were certainly not a predominant concern of Ignatius. A bishop of Antioch in the late first century and the early second century, Ignatius provided guidance and solace for the churches he encountered on his way to martyrdom by sending letters. If there is a com-

ației în cugetarea Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae,” in *Dumitru Stăniloae sau paradoxul teologiei*, ed. Teodor Bakonsky and Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban (București: Anastasia, 2003), 183–241.

10 Philo's impact on patristic authors is well documented. Everett Ferguson, “Philo and the Fathers on Music,” in *The Studia Philonica Annual* 31, ed. David T. Runia et al. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 185–199. Runia, “The Pre-Christian Origins,” 16–19; *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*, JTECL 3 (Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 1993), 37–43.

11 Philo, *Creation* 53, 69, 77, 79. See *Philo of Alexandria: On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, trans. David T. Runia, PACS 1 (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 59, 64, 66–67, 126. For Philo's cosmology, see Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* 67–87. Philo's interest in music, including liturgical, is solidly documented. Ferguson, “Philo and the Fathers,” 187–188. Everett Ferguson, “The Art of Praise: Philo and Philodemus on Music,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald et al., SNT 110 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 391–426, esp. 407–425. For the impact of Judaism on the early Christian liturgy, see Gerard Rouwhorst, “How Eschatological Was Early Christian Liturgy?” *SP* 40 (2006): 93–108, esp. 94–95.

mon denominator in his seven authentic epistles and, so, in his ecclesiological thinking, this is the fellowship of God's people,¹² then confronted by internal dissensions, cultural challenges, and social pressures.¹³ As with *Diognetus* and the overall ancient thinking, however, Ignatius' discourse is not entirely without cosmological resonances either. When he contemplates salvation in what scholars call the Starhymn—the object of my analysis—he mentions the cosmic dimension of the Lord's incarnation. Salvation is creation's divine remaking and/or rearrangement. Interestingly, the passage considers the universe through the lens of the Christian liturgy. The doxology of the church and liturgical music appear as familiar images—or cultural references—by which Ignatius conveys the notion of a universe that, renewed, sings a thanksgiving ode to the Saviour. In short, his depiction of the reorganised cosmos matches his view of Christian life as harmonious. Given this vantage point of his worldview, in what follows I discuss, first, aspects of Ignatian ecclesiology to then address the cosmic generalisation of this model.

1.1 *Ecclesiological Explorations*

Ignatius' letters abound in liturgical and poetical imagery,¹⁴ by which he encourages Christians to stay the course to the end. I am particularly interested in a passage from his *Ephesians*, where he introduces two musical illustrations of the church's life, that is, the analogy of the lyre and the metaphor of the choir. These images depict the church as a worshiping and symphonic community. Liturgical melody expresses the dynamic quality of the church's harmony. Just before the relevant passage, Ignatius advises the Ephesian faithful to "run together" with their bishop and one another¹⁵ (corresponding to the imperial standard of "like-mindedness"),¹⁶ after the example of the local presbyters. He continues:

12 Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Episcopacy* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 11, 34, 33–34, 41–42. Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, TCH (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 7, 27–28. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 76–77.

13 Ehrman, "Introduction," in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1:203–217, esp. 206–209. Joel Marcus, "Jewish Christianity," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1:87–102, esp. 97. Richard A. Norris, Jr., "The apostolic and sub-apostolic writings: the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 11–19, esp. 14–15. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 7, 26–28, 36.

14 See Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 17–18, 31, 34, 55, 63–64, 84, 89, 93, 151.

15 *Ephesians* 4.1.

16 ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ. The phrase occurs twice in the fourth chapter. *Ephesians* 4.1–2. For a recent study of the concept in Ignatius and the imperial culture of the time, see Allen Brent,

For your presbytery, which is worthy of that name and of God, is attuned to the bishop as the strings of a lyre (ὡς χορδαὶ κιθάρα). And so Jesus Christ is praised in your unanimity and consonant love. Therefore each man should join the choir (χορὸς γίνεσθε) so that—being consonant in unanimity and taking up God's tune in unity—you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, that he may both listen to and recognise you through the good deeds you achieve. For you are members of his Son (μέλη ὄντας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ).¹⁷

The passage is replete with musical terms: to be attuned; the strings of the lyre; symphonic or consonant harmony; hymn singing; become a choir; tune or pitch; one voice or unison; and to listen to the music or the voices of the chorus. These musical terms constitute a stock from which Ignatius draws his analogies and metaphors for a melodious church. Hence, being a community is not only about membership in Christ—as the Pauline paraphrase which concludes the passage suggests—but about arriving at a dynamic harmony, a symphonic coming together. The expression of this symphony, in virtuous and loving communion, is a true hymn to God. But not every word within this excerpt is of musical origin, at least not at first sight. The suggestion of William Schoedel that the end of the passage plays on the two meanings of the word μέλη, that is, members and melodies,¹⁸ is not entirely likely. The phrase's distinctly Pauline scent seems to limit the possibility. It identifies Christians as “members of his Son” (μέλη ὄντας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ),¹⁹ echoing Paul's phrase, “being members of his body” (μέλη ἐσμέν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ) at Eph 5:30. The latter, in turn, refers to the parts of the body and bears no musical connotations. The rehearsal of the Pauline stance seems to narrow down the polysemy of μέλη to the meaning of membership or participation. If the word has also a musical meaning, that is indirectly and as Ignatius' literary reworking of Paul's phrase.²⁰

Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic: A Study of an Early Christian Transformation of Pagan Culture, STAC 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2006), 231–308.

17 *Ephesians* 4.1–2.

18 William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Herm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 53. At 51–53 can be found an analysis of the passage under consideration.

19 *Ephesians* 4.2. For the use of Paul's Eph in the Ignatian corpus, see Paul Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch and the Writings that Later Formed the New Testament,” in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford University Press, 2005), 159–186, esp. 168–169.

20 I am grateful to Anna Silvas for the discussion which led me to this elucidation.

Either way, the church's body is a melodious one nonetheless, as the rest of the passage evidences by the suite of musical terms it includes. It is a structured society that takes as its point of reference the harmonious rapport between presbytery and bishop, the former being attuned to the latter like the strings of the lyre.²¹ This is not the only place where Ignatius makes recourse to this analogy. In his *Philadelphians*, the same phrase, rendered as ὡς χορδαῖς κιθάρα ("like the lyre and its strings"), is used for the local bishop "attuned" or obedient to God's commandments.²² Here, Everett Ferguson traces Philo's analogy between observing the divine commandments and music-making.²³ Mirroring Philo's approach, Ignatius' melodious structure of the church is founded on the principle of hierarchical obedience. Laity follows the guidance of the presbyters, the presbyters the bishop's, and the bishop Christ's, as Christ himself observes the will or mind of the Father.²⁴ This cascade of obedience secures the vertical harmony of the congregation. All that it performs in this spirit is a melody to God: the consonance of a lyre's well attuned strings.

The analogy of the lyre is but one musical motif within the passage under consideration. After the initial reference to the attuned strings, Ignatius turns to yet another image of church life, the choir. Before reviewing this metaphor, I must emphasise—*pace* Schoedel²⁵—that Ignatius does not focus on the relationship between these two images. Instead, he is interested in the realities which they signify. As the lyre's strings denote the harmony between presbyters and bishop, the choir and the choirmaster refer to the congregation and the bishop. Emulating the virtuous example of the presbyters, the congregation is supposed to work chorally, symphonically, or "through unanimity and consonant love," by taking "God's tune" and so praising Christ.²⁶ Note the explicit point on the symphonic energies of the church; the loving harmony of the assembly appears as an embodied song to Christ. Ferguson pinpointed here another hallmark of Philo's views, that the concordance of believers in practis-

21 *Ephesians* 4.1.

22 *Philadelphians* 1.2. For a brief analysis of this passage, see Philip A. Harland, "Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates: Local Cultural Life and Christian Identity in Ignatius' Letters," *J ECS* 11.4 (2003): 481–499, esp. 481.

23 Ferguson, "The Art of Praise," 412 and "Philo and the Fathers," 186. For Philo's influence on Ignatius, see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 89–90.

24 See further *Ephesians* 3.2; 5.1; *Philadelphians* 3.2 etc. For a recent analysis of Ignatius' structured, or hierarchical, church order, see Brent, *Ignatius and the Second Sophistic*, 121–211.

25 Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 52.

26 *Ephesians* 4.1. For a related image in Ignatius' *Romans*, see James McKinnon, *Music in early Christian literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 19.

ing virtue makes a symphony.²⁷ Accordingly, Ignatian church life is the unison of an attuned chorus. Tunefulness presupposes the free and conscious accord (see the call that “each man joins the choir,” which denotes free will) of the singers and the choirmaster. What facilitates their unison is the divine musical score, “God’s tune” taken up by the assembly.

By depicting the church as called to “become a chorus,”²⁸ Ignatius adds further imagery to the Pauline ecclesiology of Eph 4–5, and the New Testament overall, which otherwise employs tropes not inspired by the world of music. Ignatius must have borrowed from the church’s liturgical experience, where the entire assembly chants the psalms with one voice²⁹—in angelic fashion, as Clement of Rome pointed out a little earlier, before the turn of the century.³⁰ The same experience, Blowers observed,³¹ shaped the “doxological language” of early Christian theology. But what mediated this experience culturally—Harland added—was the terminology of mystery religions.³² We shall soon see that all these bear an impact on the Ignatian worldview.

What matters is that the church is called to mirror—without this nuance being explicit in the passage under consideration—the celestial choir mentioned in *Ephesians* 19.2. To that text I turn in what follows. Taking his cue from *First Clement*,³³ Ferguson showed, Ignatius treats the church and the cosmos as correspondent worshipping communities.³⁴ Ferguson’s assessment corroborates Bart Ehrman’s view of *First Clement*, in which the church community replicates the celestial order and nature in general.³⁵ This perception was widespread. Cilliers Breytenbach pointed out that the mutual mirroring of the celestial and societal choirs had numerous antecedents in ancient culture.³⁶ Later, in the seventh century, we find the church ranks and the cosmic reality mirroring each other in Maximus the Confessor’s ecclesiological work,

27 Ferguson, “The Art of Praise,” 412–413. Bogdan Bucur, to whom I am grateful for this insight, shared with me that the opposite of the melodious harmony of virtue is *πλημμέλημα*, a word usually translated by “fault” or “mistake,” but whose radical, *μέλ*, from *μέλος* (song), signifies lack of musical harmony. If virtue is harmony, sin is cacophony.

28 *Ephesians* 4.2. Cf. his *Romans* 2.2.

29 Everett Ferguson, “Toward a Patristic Theology of Music,” *SP* 24 (1993): 266–283, esp. 279–280, and the references therein.

30 McKinnon, *Music in early Christian literature*, 18.

31 Blowers, “Doctrine of Creation,” 907.

32 Harland, “Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates.”

33 See Cilliers Breytenbach, “Civic Concord and Cosmic Harmony: Sources of Metaphoric Mapping in *1 Clement* 20:3,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture*, 259–273, esp. 271.

34 Ferguson, “A Patristic Theology of Music,” 278.

35 Ehrman, “Introduction,” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1:18–33, esp. 20.

36 See Breytenbach, “Civic Concord,” 261–270. Philo, Ignatius’ source, explicitly depicted

The Mystagogy.³⁷ It is in this light that I consider Ignatius' complex articulation of the rapport between the church and the cosmos.

1.2 *Celestial Music*

After the moving depiction of the church constituted as melody, *Ephesians* returns to the metaphor of the choir in a passage known as the Starhymn.³⁸ So named by contemporary scholars, including, recently, Matthew Gordley,³⁹ this passage is not a liturgical ode.⁴⁰ Gordley calls it a didactic hymn.⁴¹ But even to refer to this passage as a hymn is inaccurate, since, despite its suggestive power, it lacks the characteristics of a poem. It rather is a rhetorically crafted piece of artistic prose. But what matters is that the Starhymn depicts the response of the universe to the Lord's advent as the acclamation of a church choir. The protagonists of the passage are the star of Christ's nativity and the eons, the other celestial bodies. In the words of Ignatius,

How did he (sc. Christ) show himself to the eons? A star whose light was ineffable shone in the sky more than all the stars, and its novelty bewildered. All the other stars, together with the sun and the moon, became a chorus (χορὸς ἐγένετο) for the (new) star whose light surpassed all the others. And there was disturbance regarding the source of this novelty and unlikelihood to them.⁴²

This passage echoes Matt 2 (esp. v. 2, 7, 9–10), where Christ's nativity is announced by a strange star.⁴³ Ignatius links the astronomical event and Christ's birth explicitly, leaving little doubt that he alludes to the Matthean story. The cosmic phenomenon that accompanied Christ's birth interested many early

the mind and the heavens as converging in their praising God. See Ferguson, "Philo and the Fathers," 186–187.

37 *The Mystagogy* 1, 2, 7.

38 For an analysis of the text, see F.H. Stander, "The Starhymn in the Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians (19:2–3)," *VC* 43:3 (1989): 209–214.

39 Matthew E. Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity: Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 353–355.

40 Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 8, 87–88. Schoedel altogether rejected the possibility that the Ignatian letters incorporate liturgical material.

41 Gordley, *Teaching through Song*, 352.

42 *Ephesians* 19.2.

43 For a detailed analysis of the Matthean episode, its sources, and its early Christian reception, see Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, ps 6 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 202–222.

Christian authors,⁴⁴ Ignatius seemingly being the first to have tapped the richness of its theological, soteriological, and cosmological significance. Which means that Dale Allison's list of early Christian sources dealing with the nativity star⁴⁵ must also include Ignatius' name. As with Allison's omission, it is difficult to grasp Schoedel's reservations concerning the possibility of a Matthean reference here.⁴⁶ Recent scholarship substantiates Ignatius' familiarity with the Gospel of Matthew,⁴⁷ proving Schoedel's objections unfounded. My concerns, however, are of a different sort.

This excerpt depicts a novel star disturbing the sidereal arrangement and instigating a reordering of the universe. A meaningful nexus exists between Christ and the new star,⁴⁸ by which the Lord's power is transposed as a celestial occurrence. Both this connection and its outcome, the transfer of power, answer the original question about Christ's manifestation ("How did he show himself to the eons?"), and the wonder of the eons at what caused the mighty celestial sign ("there was disturbance regarding the source of this novelty"). In suggesting this transposition, Ignatius obviously reworks the Matthean narrative, where this matter is not mentioned.

That the strange star shares in the power of the Lord is shown by the sun, the moon, and the distant stars adjusting their routine to its advent by becoming its chorus.⁴⁹ The natural song of the celestial bodies—noticed a little earlier by Clement of Rome⁵⁰—receives a new impetus through the phenomenon. The cosmos is thereby endowed with new theological and soteriological connotations. Its song is more harmonious, being freed from evil. This latter aspect appears in a reference to the vanishing of abhorrent practices and situations:

44 For a survey of the early Christian representation of the nativity star as an unusual occurrence, see Dale C. Allison, Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 17–41, esp. 18–19. This survey makes only a brief reference to Ignatius (at 32 n. 49), wrongly attributing to him the idea—not present in our text—that the star was purposely created in order to guide the magi.

45 Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 20 n. 11.

46 See Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 92. Instead, he analysed the passage in the light of the Gnostic literature produced decades after the Ignatian corpus. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 87–93. Hegedus, *Early Christianity*, 207, refers to Schoedel's doubts without challenging his views. See also Tim Hegedus, "The Magi and the Star in the Gospel of Matthew and Early Christian Tradition," *LTP* 59.1 (2003): 81–95, esp. 89–93.

47 Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 32, 112, 149, 151. Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius," 173–181. Gordley, *Teaching through Song*, 355.

48 Rightly, Stander, "The Starhymn," 213, observes that the hymn identifies the star with Christ.

49 $\chi\omicron\rho\omicron\varsigma$ ἐγένετο τῷ ἀστέρει (*Ephesians* 19.2).

50 *First Clement* 20. The chapter seems to be summarising Ps 103 (LXX).

“all magic was dismantled and every bond of evil was removed.”⁵¹ A couple of centuries later, Athanasius echoed this position, affirming that the Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection brought liberation from evil and deception.⁵² Relevant for now is the meaningful bridge between Christ and the nativity star. The star makes obvious the discrete yet encompassing reach of the salvation wrought by Christ.

The celestial phenomenon could not have had this impact by itself. It was not the “workings of the star,” as F.H. Stander asserted, that caused the cosmic reordering as a chorus.⁵³ It was the Lord. The saving power revealed to the universe belongs to Christ, not to the coruscating star. Christ’s activity holds a prominent place in the discourse of Ignatius, here and elsewhere.⁵⁴ That Christ is the topic of the Starhymn is obvious from the outset by way of a rhetorical interrogation: “How did he show himself to the eons?” The christological aspect finds confirmation in the next portion of the text, which does not mention the celestial phenomenon at all, but focuses instead on the “human way in which God revealed himself, for the novelty of life eternal.”⁵⁵ The overlapping of Christ’s cosmic revelation to the eons and his revelation through the incarnation is inescapable.⁵⁶ The cosmic agent and the historical saviour are one. Therefore, what causes a tumult in the heavens is the manifestation of God incarnate.⁵⁷ The power to change the cosmos is divine power.

Against this theological backdrop, Ignatius makes an important point about the cosmos and its renewal. He does so by drawing an implicit symmetry between the saved universe, represented by the reordered sidereal scenery, and the church, as saved humankind. This symmetry transpires when the passage under consideration is taken together with *Ephesians* 4.1–2. Salvation is not only a human event of gathering as church; it has cosmic effects. The starfield and overall the cosmos are granted the same salvation as the church, and

51 *Ephesians* 19.3. See Hegedus, *Early Christianity*, 207–208.

52 *Incarnation* 15 etc. Athanasius was clearer than Ignatius in distinguishing the celestial sign from its source: Christ made the star shine as a sign of his divine rule. *Incarnation* 37.30–34.

53 Stander, “The Starhymn,” 211–212.

54 Gordley, *Teaching through Song*, 353, 354–355. Ferguson, “Philo and the Fathers,” 183 n. 53. Quasten, *Patrology*, 1:65.

55 *Ephesians* 19.3. For references to this passage, see Brent, *Ignatius and the Second Sophistic*, 230 and Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 93–94.

56 *Ephesians* 19.2–3.

57 The confession of Christ as God is another constant feature of Ignatius’ teaching. Behr, *Christian Theology*, 1:84, 90–92. Brandon Cline and Trevor Thomson, “Ignatius Redux: Bart Ehrman on Ignatius and His Letters,” *JR* 86:3 (2006): 442–454, esp. 443.

together with it. As a result, the universe becomes a chorus that praises Christ, matching the way the church gratefully sings to the saviour. In the evocative image of Winton, when two boys sing in their boat at night, the river and the stars merge together, becoming a place of wonder and peace.⁵⁸ The metaphor of the starfield become a chorus—likewise met in another writing from the same timeframe⁵⁹—deserves further attention.

The image of the choral or liturgical starfield must be the outcome of Ignatius' juxtaposition of two scriptural exempla, the cosmic phenomenon described in Matt 2 and the angelic choruses of Luke 2:13–14. The presence of Lucan material in the Ignatian corpus is well documented.⁶⁰ But, mirroring their doubts regarding the Starhymn and Matt 2, scholars ignore Luke 2 as a source of inspiration for the passage. They are more interested in the dream of Joseph (Gen 37:9), where the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bow down to the patriarch. Stander, for example, reworked Schoedel's tentative proposal on the impact of Joseph's dream⁶¹ into a statement that this dream was the main source behind Ignatius' celestial choirs.⁶² But this only goes so far. Joseph's dream would account for the Starhymn's reverent celestial bodies and for the heavenly rearrangement, but not for the nativity star as a christological symbol. Balaam's fourth prophecy at Num 24:17 about the messianic star shining forth from Jacob is a better textual antecedent. Moreover, celestial choirs are absent from Gen 37:9, where the sun, the moon, and the stars bow down in mute reverence, while singing stars feature in the Psalter (LXX 18:1–4; 148:3–4), in the Book of Job (38:7), in Philo,⁶³ and in Stoicism.⁶⁴ Ignatius was surely well aware of some if not all of these literary antecedents, which he creatively amalgamated into a poetical rewriting of the Matthean episode. This creative remake of heterogenous materials into a new narrative matches Allen Brent's portrayal of Ignatius as transforming pagan culture.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, and without denying the impact of the other images discussed above, I propose that the Starhymn's singing or dancing⁶⁶ celestial bodies emulate the angelic choirs of the Lucan nativity story. True, it is the angels who

58 Winton, *Cloudstreet*, 114.

59 See "the choirs of the stars" (ἀστέρων τε χοροί) in *First Clement* 20.3.

60 See Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius," 181–182 and the sources quoted there.

61 Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 92.

62 Stander, "The Starhymn," 213.

63 Ferguson, "The Art of Praise," 415.

64 Ferguson, "A Patristic Theology of Music," 271 n. 30.

65 Brent, *Ignatius and the Second Sophistic*.

66 χορός is polysemic, meaning both chorus and dancing. This polysemy is well exploited by Philo, *Creation* 53, 78, 126.

chant hymns to the Lord there, not the stars, but Ignatius conflates the two images. Replacing Luke's angels by the sidereal bodies was an ingenious stylistic move on his part. It must have been facilitated by the widespread identification of the stars with angels in various Jewish and Christian sources of that age,⁶⁷ and the view of the stars as alive.⁶⁸ As Margaret Barker pointed out, Ignatius was equally aware of matters astronomical and angelic, and knew about the link between the stars and the spiritual beings.⁶⁹ He could have easily combined the two Gospel narratives by changing the Lucan angels into Matthew's implicit starfield evoked by the nativity star. The mark of Luke's narrative upon the Starhymn should not be dismissed. We retain Ignatius' stars chorally chanting—or dancing—together in angelic fashion around the cosmic object that announced the Lord's nativity.

These findings clarify something else in the Starhymn. The scriptural background of the praising heavens, namely, the celestial choirs of the Psalter and the singing angels of Luke, demand a positive appraisal of the eons bedazzled by the occurrence of the nativity star. Considered through the lens of this scriptural material, the celestial choreography of the Starhymn, *pace* Schoedel, does not refer to a dramatic clash between light and darkness, or between the warring eons of the Gnostic myths.⁷⁰ It isn't about Lovecraft's threatening stars that "leer down from the same place in the black vault, winking hideously."⁷¹ The heavenly powers were often mistrusted in late antiquity—as Alan Scott has shown⁷²—and therefore Schoedel's interpretation may be correct to a degree. But Ignatius' eons, configured after a scriptural pattern, are not dark forces. Their presence is not threatening, even though the nova terrifies them. To their positive depiction may have contributed, however, more than this weaving of scriptural images. Ignatius seems to have also adhered to a very different representation of reality, namely, a naturalistic one. Let me explain.

67 See Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 25–28 (the stars as angels) and 28–30 (the magi's star as an angel). The interchangeability of stars and angels is obvious in Rev 1:20, where these beings symbolise the bishops of the seven churches. On the seven stars of Revelation, see Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, VCSup 95 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 94–95.

68 Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 21–25, 30–33. Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea*, OECs (Oxford University Press and Clarendon Press, 1991), 3–62, 113–149. Neither Allison nor Scott pays attention to Ignatius' view of the stars.

69 Barker, *Creation*, 81 (on *Trallians* 5), 283 (mentioning a statement about Ignatius in Eusebius of Caesarea).

70 Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 91–92.

71 Lovecraft, "Polaris," 33.

72 Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 76–103.

Corresponding to Aristides and the Disciple's physicalist cosmology discussed in Chapter One, the eons of Ignatius are sidereal bodies—the cosmic panorama itself, the starfield, God's visible creation—not entities of the spiritual realm. Ignatius upholds a complex representation of reality. The mythic reading of the living and/or angelic stars that sing is but one way of considering the matter at hand. Mythology was not the only worldview available at the time. Various cosmographers treated the sidereal bodies from a purely astronomical angle, as physical objects, free of zoomorphic or angelomorphic connotations.⁷³ Ignatius subscribes to this physicalist worldview. Accordingly, he understands the eons as celestial bodies, namely, the sun, the moon, and the stars mentioned in the relevant passage. There is nothing evil about these natural objects. Recently, Gordley demonstrated that the “powers,” or eons, or the Starhymn are indeed celestial bodies.⁷⁴ Against this backdrop, the passage presents a reorganised starfield consisting of astronomical bodies moving in the sky. This naturalist perception elicits at least one interesting implication. The ripples of salvation taken as a redesigned music of the spheres—together with the phenomenon of the star and the puzzlement of the eons turned into music—relativise a central tenet of ancient cosmology. For the ancients viewed the celestial spheres as immutable and mute and, sometimes, as circumscribed by a solid vault.⁷⁵ Ignatius challenges this idea by speaking of a *new* cosmic occurrence—the strange star—and the reorganisation of the starfield into a choir. In so doing, he depicts a natural cosmos that moves and changes, resembling the modern view that “the universe cannot just sit there from eternity, filled with stars from end to end.”⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Ignatius' is a universe which, like in *Diognetus*, is open to the divine insofar as it is theologically stamped. Above our heads, the stars don't go by silently. They haven't forgotten the message they are supposed to convey.⁷⁷

What does all this signify in terms of the Ignatian worldview? To answer this question, we must review what we learnt about the stars, or eons. According to

73 Dirk L. Couprie, *Heaven and Earth in Ancient Greek Cosmology: From Thales to Heraclides Ponticus* (New York: Springer, 2011), 99–121. Georgia L. Irby-Massie and Paul T. Keyser, *Greek Science of the Hellenistic Era: A Sourcebook*, RSAW (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 47–81.

74 Gordley, *Teaching through Song*, 354.

75 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 27–28. Couprie, *Heaven and Earth*, 109–110, 203–204. Keimpe Algra, “The Early Stoics on the Immutability and Coherence of the Cosmos,” *Phronesis* 33:2 (1988): 155–180.

76 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 45.

77 The last two sentences allude to Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 27–28 and Lovecraft, “Polaris,” 36.

Ignatius' complex cosmology, they are physical objects whose preexistent order was rearranged at the incarnation by the appearance of the novel star. But they also are created beings whose musical or liturgical potential was activated by the event. The incarnation restored both their nature and their voices, which previously have been either silenced or distorted by evil. And from then on, these voices work in a new, liturgical fashion, as a church choir singing praises. The renewed activity of the celestial bodies reminds one of the bells and the *semantron* which Marcello La Matina analysed in the music of Arvo Pärt, where these archaic instruments are put to a new use.⁷⁸ In like manner, the stars sing a new song.

Either way, the good nature of the eons becomes apparent. As singing physical bodies—music being a dimension of the world⁷⁹—the eons are part of a positive worldview which paved the way for Clement's equally positive perception.⁸⁰ This being the case, the identification of the wondering stars or the amazed eons with evil powers makes no sense. This is even more obvious when we compare the Starhymn and *Ephesians* 4.1–2. We already know that the celestial scenery of Ignatius resembles the view of the church as a chorus attuned to God and which praises Christ. The sidereal bodies turn towards Christ's star and sing both like the Lucan angels and in the very manner of the church assembly, pointing to their maker and saviour. The church choir lends to the stars its own "congregational" structure and with it a liturgical function. We shall soon discover that Athanasius both reiterated and offered a counterpoint to Ignatius' approach. Regardless, Ignatius' is a positive worldview.

To sum up, the correspondence between the imagery of the two passages is noteworthy. By representing the church and the cosmos as choirs,⁸¹ Ignatius established a meaningful axis between them. As a result, they appear as connected realities and as interchangeable categories. The church is a singing cosmos, the cosmos is a singing church. Both proclaim God's glory and in so doing function as means of revelation that convey divine knowledge.⁸² A subtle difference occurs however in *Ephesians* 4.2, which refers to God listening to and recognising the congregation provided it becomes "symphonic" in its vir-

78 See Marcello La Matina, "L'inscrutabile voce della triade: I tintinnabuli di Arvo Pärt tra filosofia e liturgia," *DV* 10 (2010): 263–285.

79 See Marcello La Matina, "Il Corpo del suono: Considerazioni su musica e forme di vita," in *Grammatica della musica, grammatica della percezione*, ed. Domenica Lentini and Stefano Oliva (Roma: Il Glifo, 2015), 100–113, esp. 100.

80 Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 106.

81 See *χορὸς γίνεσθε* and *χορὸς ἐγένετο*. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 88, noticed this literal connection but did not discuss it.

82 See Ferguson, "A Patristic Theology of Music," 270–271.

tuous workings. The church receives a conditional blessing that depends on human worthiness or, literally, on truly becoming a choir (χορὸς γίνεσθε). In turn, the sidereal bodies of *Ephesians* 19.2 recognise Christ without difficulty in the occurrence of the novel star, thus becoming a choir (χορὸς ἐγένετο). While the cosmos has a natural sense for God, so to speak, the church must cultivate this sense through its worthy, virtuous activities—precisely those activities that enhance its harmony.

What matters is that by entwining various images and sources, including various representations of reality, Ignatius construed the universe as ordered, melodious, and theologically meaningful. This depiction was not lost, we shall see below, on later theologians.

2 Irenaeus

With or without a literary continuity being obvious, we shall see below that the melodic images of Ignatius and, partially, of *First Clement*, the lyre and the chorus, reappear in the cosmological thought of Clement and Athanasius. But before turning to the Alexandrians, I must discuss the use of the analogy of the lyre by Clement's older contemporary, Irenaeus.⁸³

Irenaeus was bishop of Lyon in the second half of the second century. Trained in Smyrna by Ignatius' friend, Polycarp,⁸⁴ he often addressed matters of the Christian worldview. What stimulated him to do so were the Gnostic cosmologies which also challenged Clement and Origen, his younger Alexandrian confrères. To map his way of representing reality is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to point out that in the last couple of decades his thinking on this topic received scholarly attention.⁸⁵ In what follows I consider a

83 A series of monographs analyse this work. John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, CTC (Oxford University Press, 2013). Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). M.C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*, VCSup 91 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008).

84 Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 57–66, 200. Behr, *Christian Theology*, 1:111. Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus*, ECF (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 26–27, 29. Denis Minns, "Irenaeus of Lyons," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, 71–83, esp. 71. Denis Minns, *Irenaeus*, OCT (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 1. Quasten, *Patrology*, 1:287. Trigg, "The Apostolic Fathers and Apologists," 304.

85 Giuliano Chiapparini, "Irenaeus and the Gnostic Valentinus: Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Church of Rome around the Middle of the Second Century," *ZAC* 18:1 (2014): 95–119. Paul Gavriluk, "Creation in Early Christian Polemical Literature: Irenaeus against the Gnostics and Athanasius against the Arians," *MTh* 29:2 (2013): 22–32, esp. 22–29. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 21–100.

single example of his applying melodic imagery to cosmology. The passage in question illustrates a similar approach to those later encountered in Clement and Athanasius, but it is difficult to prove a literary connection between them because the Irenaeus text is not available in its original. That said, the presence of the same approach in these authors may prove at least their use of common sources, possibly Ignatius and definitely Philo.

Irenaeus employed the analogy of the lyre—Latin *cithara*;⁸⁶ cf. in Ignatius the Greek κιθάρα—to illustrate the coherence of a universe ordered by one God.⁸⁷ This is a decidedly different use from Ignatius and Clement of Rome, who saw creation through the lens of the choral image. In using the lyre analogy in a cosmological sense, Irenaeus may have borrowed from Philo's symbolic correspondence between the seven strings of the instrument and the choral dance of the seven planets.⁸⁸ The representation of the seven planets in musical terms was quite common at the time. In the first half of the third century, Origen quoted Celsus, a second century critic of Christianity, as a witness to this usage.⁸⁹ Relevant is that, according to John Behr,⁹⁰ Irenaeus was not a stranger to the employment of musical images and terms in cosmological contexts, and other areas. A little before introducing the analogy of the lyre, he refers to the cosmic diversity and unity by way of a musically charged vocabulary:

When each one of the many and various beings that have been made is considered apart from the others, they are contrary and discordant. But, (when they are considered) together with the whole of the creation, they are harmonious and consonant (*bene aptata et bene consonantia*)—

86 For some reason, in his retroversion Harvey (at 343 n. 2, n. 4) rendered *cithara* by λύρα, lyre. The sentence is part of the passage which I analyse below. Harvey must have been inspired by Philo's preference for the same term. Philo, *Creation* 126.

87 *Heresies* 2.25.2. See *St Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, revised by John J. Dillon, ACW 65 (New York and Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 2012), 82–83.

88 See Philo's (*Creation* 126.3–4) reference to “the lyre with seven strings, which is analogous to the chorus of the (seven) planets” (λύρα μὲν γὰρ ἡ ἐπτάχορδος ἀναλογουσα τῇ τῶν πλανήτων χορείᾳ). For notes on this line, see Ferguson, “Philo and the Fathers,” 190. For Philo's limited influence upon Irenaeus, see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 116–118. I am grateful to David Runia for alerting me about the Platonic roots (e.g. *Timaeus* 40c3) of Philo's stance on the dancing stars.

89 Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.22.21–26. For Celsus' dealing with music in cosmological settings, see Henry Chadwick, “Introduction,” in *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. H. Chadwick (Cambridge University Press, 1980), ix–xxxii, esp. xxix and 335 n. 2.

90 Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 9–11, 52, 114, 117, 119, 125, 145, 165, 190–192, 195, 207.

the way the sound of the lyre (*citharae sonus*), which consists of many and opposite sounds, makes one harmonious melody through the interval pertaining to them.⁹¹

This text addresses creation's diversity or multiplicity, indicating how the various parts of the cosmos are reconciled within the whole. The analytical approach, which prescribes the examination of the parts in separation from the whole, misses the coherence and the meaning of the creation, but both coherence and meaning emerge when all things are considered together, in synthesis.

Opposing the Gnostics' solution to the issue of unity and plurality—or rather, their inability to find one⁹²—Irenaeus gives a polemical answer, meaning to set the record straight. A comprehensive representation of reality holds unity and multiplicity, or the whole and the parts, together. His grasp of reality finds echoes in Gregory of Nyssa's view of the creation as a single event and multiple events, discussed below in Chapter Six. It also anticipates what Louth calls Maximus the Confessor's "Chalcedonian logic" of union and distinction.⁹³ The complex cosmology of Irenaeus, together with the input of his traditional heirs, are important landmarks of the cultural history that continues in the contemporary quest for meaning, grand narratives, and theories of everything. The latter, for example, face similar difficulties when it is about bridging the whole and the details.

More important for the argument of this chapter, however, is that Irenaeus' solution entails the use of musical terms and imagery. The plural *consonantia* may be interpreted both musically, "symphonic," and otherwise, "in agreement." The phrase *bene aptata*, likewise, may mean both "well fitted" and "harmonious." According to W.W. Harvey, the phrase *bene aptata et bene consonantia* would have been rendered in the original Greek as εὐάρμοστα καὶ σύμφωνα,⁹⁴

91 *Heresies* 2.25.2. For an analysis of the text within its context, see Rousseau and Doutrelleau, *Irénée de Lyon*, 1:171–173. Minns includes this passage in a string of references to the richness of creation as proving the existence of one bountiful creator. See Minns, *Irenaeus*, 25, and 34 n. 1. The passage is mentioned only once in Steenberg's *Irenaeus on Creation*, n. 109 at 96. In turn, Osborn discusses this passage several times. See his *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 60, 160, 194, 197, 256.

92 Chiapparini, "Irenaeus and Valentinus," 105–115. Minns, *Irenaeus*, 25–26.

93 Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 22. The best illustration of this logic applied to the cosmos is undoubtedly Maximus' *Difficulty* 7.2–4, 15–17.

94 See Harvey's *Sancti Irenaei*, 343 n. 2.

echoing Philo's vocabulary⁹⁵ and cohering with Irenaeus' rich musical terms analysed by Behr. This choice of words prepares the straightforward musical analogy of the lyre.

Taken separately, the lyre's cords produce different sounds, yet taken together they combine into a harmonious melody. The separate sounds, perhaps meaningless and unpleasant on their own, give delight when skilfully combined as music. Similarly, the cosmos consists of "many and various beings" which appear to be "contrary and discordant" with one another when isolated from the whole. But when they are perceived as one creation—without a loss of the differences—they are "harmonious and consonant," resulting in a meaningfully ordered universe. The passage states the obvious about reality, of course, since nothing exists in isolation from other things and from the universe in its entirety. As John Donne's celebrated line has it, "No man is an island."⁹⁶ Relevant, here, is that Irenaeus discloses something profound about the early Christian view of the universe. It is a holistic way of looking at things which allows to piece together the varied tesserae of reality into a beautiful mosaic; irrespective of their difference from one another, the many beings constitute one world. Or, to take the aural analogy, more suitable for the topic of this chapter—it is a matter of listening to nature's sounds through an earpiece which allows one to hear the music of the spheres. As such, the early Christian universe is ordered, a complex melody upsurging from the different sounds of its many strings. We shall see below that Clement entertained similar views of reality as melodious, but he developed them well beyond Irenaeus' scope.

I mentioned above one difference between Irenaeus and Ignatius, in that Ignatius did not use the image of the lyre in cosmological settings. Apart from that, the vocabulary of the Irenaeian passage echoes *Ephesians*. Given the retroversion of *consonantia* and *consonantem* into σύμφωνα and σύμφωνον,⁹⁷ it becomes obvious that Irenaeus borrowed Ignatius' theme of symphony or harmony. Other differences still remain. While Ignatius introduced the liturgical symphony of the church, Irenaeus generalised this image for the creation in its entirety, beyond the intimations of the Starhymn. That said, facilitating his generalisation was undoubtedly Ignatius' liturgical appraisal of the church and the cosmos as praising communities. Irenaeus appreciated Ignatius' insight. Just a couple of lines after the above passage, he acknowledges cosmic harmony as theologically meaningful—as pointing towards God, "the one and

95 See Ferguson, "The Art of Praise," 417–418.

96 John Donne, *xvii Meditation in Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, together with Death's Duel* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), 108–109, esp. 109.

97 Harvey, *Sancti Irenaei*, 343 n. 2, n. 4.

the same artist and maker.”⁹⁸ Resembling listeners applauding an artist for the lyre’s beautiful music,⁹⁹ anyone who contemplates the cosmic order can “neither ignore the artist, nor abandon the faith in the one God who made all things, nor blaspheme against our maker.”¹⁰⁰ We shall soon discover that Athanasius entertained a similar thought.¹⁰¹ Irenaeus’ reference to the faith that discerns a theologically meaningful universe contradicts Dominic Unger’s view that knowing God in creation is “by reason, not by faith.”¹⁰² Contemplatively approached, the world is an effective means of divine revelation: God works in and speaks/sings through the cosmos. Either way, the worldview of Irenaeus is not limited to affirming God’s transcendence over the cosmos.¹⁰³

Irenaeus returns to the topic of the creation pointing to God a little later and from a different angle, quite apart from the musical framing considered above. There he affirms the agreement of Scripture and the cosmos that there is one God who created the universe and rules over it.¹⁰⁴ It is at this juncture—where we trace the kernel of later developments about the scriptural nature of the cosmos¹⁰⁵—that Irenaeus overtly parts ways with Ignatius. For the latter, indeed, the Scriptures play no role towards authenticating doctrine.¹⁰⁶ We shall see below that Clement and Athanasius adopted Irenaeus’ twofold approach to the cosmos, that is, by way of the analogy of the lyre and through the scriptural connection. But the Alexandrians were also mindful of Ignatius’ choral imagery, which they both replayed in reference to the cosmos.

To sum up this part of my analysis, it is noteworthy that by using melodic images and terms to articulate the Christian worldview, Ignatius and Irenaeus creatively engaged the cultural milieu of their time. The parallels with Philo’s musical references are also illustrative of this stance. Their melodic depictions

98 *Heresies* 2.25.2.

99 Textually, “they have to praise and glorify the artist” (*Heresies* 2.25.2).

100 *Heresies* 2.25.2.

101 Cf. *Gentiles* 47.14–31.

102 See *St Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, 124 n. 5.

103 See Minns, *Irenaeus*, 33–34. For a nuanced view, affirming the transcendence and the presence of God, see Norris, *God and World*, 84–86. And for an analysis of Irenaeus’ sense of divine activity in the cosmos, see Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 26–28.

104 *Heresies* 2.27.2. For the revelational correspondence of Scripture and the creation, see the notes of Rousseau and Doutrelleau, 1170, 174–175, and Unger, *St Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, n. 5 at 122–124. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 61, refers to the passage in 2.27.2 without noticing the convergence of the two sources.

105 See Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 153. No reference to *Heresies* 2.27.2.

106 For Ignatius and Irenaeus’ scriptural exegesis, see Trigg, “The Apostolic Fathers and Apologists,” 305–307, 327–330.

of the ordered universe express their appreciation for God's creation as theologically meaningful and as a means of revelation. Ignatius' chorus metaphor, for example, depicts the universe as profoundly melodious, intoning hymns to God in "congregational" fashion. His cosmos is a liturgical one. In turn, Irenaeus' analogy of the lyre conveys a harmoniously ordered, meaningful cosmos of unity and diversity, which points to one God. His cosmos is a revelatory one. This evidence calls into question Behr's assessment that for both fathers the source of revelation is Scripture only.¹⁰⁷ From a different vantage point, the images they employed present a divinely created and led cosmos that welcomes the oppressed Christians of those times. A cosmos both liturgical and scriptural is by no means innately hostile.

I must now turn to the Alexandrian witnesses, who creatively developed these antecedents. For reasons of chronology, I begin with Clement.

3 Clement

In the tumultuous intellectual atmosphere of Alexandria throughout the second and in the early third century, Christian teachers like Clement faced—in addition to the hostility *Diognetus* documents—the competition of many cultured opponents. The clash is still apparent in the works of Clement's younger contemporary, Origen, who refuted Celsus' critique of Christianity.¹⁰⁸ Clement himself, in the footsteps of Irenaeus, confronted the Gnostic cosmologies in the same forum where this debate was played out, intellectual exchanges.¹⁰⁹ To that end he adopted sophisticated strategies, including by engaging cultural trends of the time.¹¹⁰ The same holds true for the apologetic treatise

107 Behr, *Christian Theology*, 1:81–92, 111–133.

108 Chadwick, "Introduction," ix–xiii. Gianluca Piscini, "Le dialogue avec les chrétiens dans le *Discours Véritable* de Celse," *Adamantius* 22 (2016): 139–152.

109 *Stromateis* 5.1.3. See Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 119–131.

110 Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, "Clement of Alexandria," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, 84–97, esp. 85–86. Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of 'Heresy' from Photius' Bibliotheca*, VCSup 101 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 53–54, 97, 105. Charles H. Cosgrove, "Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music," *J ECS* 14:3 (2006): 255–282, esp. 258–264. Andrew C. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria*, VCSup 97 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 83. Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and culture in the second and third centuries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 22, 58–60, 61–62. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 104–110. Mark Sheridan, *Language for God in Patristic Tradition: Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2015), 108–109. Calvin R. Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK:

relevant here, *Exhortation*,¹¹¹ and for his other major writings. His goal was to disseminate the Christian message through appropriate channels, or to deliver it in a culturally marketable form. Accordingly, within *Exhortation* he deployed tools meant to convince the hesitant among the Christian intelligentsia, whose adherence to the Gospel was slowed by their fascination with Gnosticism and with classical learning. Among other devices Clement deployed tropes, analogies, and metaphors borrowed from the arts—especially music—which were highly esteemed in the Hellenic *paideia*.¹¹² Similarly to other early Christian authors, he modified these musical images to suit his purposes.¹¹³

In what follows, of the complex representation of reality which he developed, I select for attention the musical vocabulary and imagery in the first chapter of *Exhortation* and parallel texts. I discuss their significance for his missionary strategies and, immediately relevant here, his cosmological thinking.

3.1 *Mapping a Symphonic Universe*

The opening pages of *Exhortation* overflow with musical suggestions and images, such as the singer, the song, the instruments, the orchestra, the choir, and the symphony. These images work within a soteriological framework, bearing cosmological, existential, and religious connotations. Of immediate interest is that, so repurposed, these images depict the created world as theologically meaningful and replete with pedagogical significance. It has been observed that pedagogy was a main concern for Clement even in matters cosmological, the universe teaching the contemplative person about God's existence, work, and intentions.¹¹⁴ No wonder his cosmos is marked by divine activity

William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 47. Robert Lewis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 55–57.

111 Scholars have discussed at length this writing. John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 44–67 (pp. 45–47 are especially useful, discussing the first chapter). Mondésert, “Introduction” to *Clément d’Alexandrie: Le Protrepétique*, 6–50, esp. 27–42. Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 31–36.

112 La Matina, “Il Corpo del suono,” 104–106. Eli Maor, *Music by the Numbers: From Pythagoras to Schoenberg* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 19.

113 For a catalogue of musical occurrences in *Exhortation*, see McKinnon, *Music in early Christian literature*, 29–31. For the continuities and discontinuities between the classical and the early Christian approaches to music, see A.W.J. Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786 and the Relationship between Ancient Greek and Early Christian Music,” *VC* 26 (1972): 1–17.

114 Blowers, “Doctrine of Creation,” 918. See also Doru Costache, “Being, Well-being, Being for Ever: Creation’s Existential Trajectory in Patristic Tradition,” in *Well-being, Personal Wholeness and the Social Fabric*, ed. Doru Costache et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 55–87, esp. 58–60.

and encoded with theological signs which believers must decipher. The musical tropes are instrumental to that end. They bring to the fore the pedagogical dimension of the world and also reveal how people of faith can access it.¹¹⁵ Behind this musical worldview is Clement's perception of reality through the multifocal lens of the Psalms,¹¹⁶ the Jewish tabernacle mysticism,¹¹⁷ the Pythagorean worldview,¹¹⁸ and Philo's cosmological insights.¹¹⁹ His familiarity with *First Clement*, Ignatius, and Irenaeus¹²⁰ also emboldened him to explore new avenues along the same lines.

Clement presents a God who brings the cosmos into being and order by playing on various instruments, namely, all the created and the uncreated strands of reality. How some instruments are created and others uncreated will become apparent in what follows. Accordingly, the universe is a polyphonic *organon*—or an orchestra—while the laws of nature are the score of a divine song that pervades everyone and everything.¹²¹ Existence and order are musical. Something like the melody upsurging from people's subconscious in a book by Ray

115 Stapert, *A New Song*, 49–59. Ferguson, “A Patristic Theology of Music,” 276.

116 The chapter under consideration contains psalmic material from the Septuagint, such as “the new song” of Ps 32:3; 39:3; 95:1; 97:1; 149:1 (*Exhortation* 1.2.4; 1.4.4; 1.6.1; 1.6.5; 1.7.3) and “before the morning star” of Ps 109:3 (*Exhortation* 1.6.1). Immediately relevant is the topic of the “new song,” which is so characteristic to both the Book of Psalms and *Exhortation*, and which denotes a direct literary dependence of Clement's musical sensitivity on the Psalter. For more on the psalmic vocabulary and imagery of *Exhortation*, see Fabienne Jourdan, “Le Logos et l'empereur, nouveaux Orphée: Postérité d'une image entrée dans la littérature avec Clément d'Alexandrie,” *VC* 62 (2008): 319–333, esp. 320. See also Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria,” 264–266.

117 Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria,” 276–277.

118 See Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria*, 24, 28, 36, 40, 49, 64 etc. For Clement's reliance on Pythagorean insights, see Gerald Bostock, “Origen and the Pythagoreanism of Alexandria,” in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:465–478, esp. 466, 568, 470–471. For an overview of Pythagorean cosmology, see Pierre Duhem, *Le système du monde: Histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic*, ten vols (Paris: Hermann, 1965), 1:5–27. For a recent appraisal of Pythagorean cosmic music, see Maor, *Music by the Numbers*, 13–20.

119 Philo's influence on the Clementine *Exhortation* and other works is documented. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria*, 27–31. Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*, 46. David T. Runia, “Clement of Alexandria and the Philonic Doctrine of the Divine Power(s),” *VC* 58:3 (2004): 256–276, esp. 256–257, 269; “The Pre-Christian Origins,” 16–23; *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 135–156. J.C.M. van Winden, “Quotations from Philo in Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus*,” *VC* 32 (1978): 208–213. In turn, Stapert, *A New Song*, 52–53, unconvincingly claims direct Platonic affiliations for the Clementine discourse, altogether ignoring Philo. Of course, the influence of other classical and Christian sources cannot be dismissed. See Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria,” 277–280.

120 Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 49. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 23–24.

121 For details, see Costache, “Meaningful Cosmos,” 116–121.

Bradbury seems to be heard everywhere we turn.¹²² Humankind itself is part of both the orchestra and the song, having to learn how to interpret the divine score of the universe. So perceived, the universe does more than exist, move, and live within the divine milieu. It is a system of signs teaching wisdom—as does the Ignatian starfield—in liturgical and doxological fashion. As a framework and channel for divine disclosure, the cosmos glorifies God through the many voices and instruments which constitute it. To express this view, Clement deploys the established musical vocabulary and imagery of the time by dint of a tripartite pattern. According to Everett Ferguson, this pattern, running from Philo to the Christian theologians of the fifth century, includes cosmic elements, the human being, and society.¹²³

Illustrating the first element of this pattern are the cicadas, which, in the warmth of summer sing their “natural ode” (αὐτόνομον ᾠδὴν) to God. Their ode is more meaningful than the confused theological ideas of pagan singers and poets.¹²⁴ This is the humblest of examples, but Clement also addresses loftier situations. The divine Logos stirs the entire creation to worship, which glorifies God continuously. Here is a relevant passage:

Setting aside the lyre and the harp, soulless instruments, and in the Holy Spirit bringing to harmony (ἁρμόσάμενος) this very world and the small cosmos, namely, the human being with its soul and body, the Logos of God plays hymns to God on this polyphonic instrument (πολυφώνου ὀργάνου) and sings by way of this instrument, the human being.¹²⁵

This excerpt shows that the Logos—together with the Spirit—operates throughout the creation with the aim to bringing it and its summation—the psychosomatic human being—into one harmonious measure. By way of this musically attuned creation, the Logos plays and sings praises to God the Father.

122 Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2012), 2–19.

123 Ferguson, “A Patristic Theology of Music,” 283. For some reason, here, Ferguson ignores Clement’s rich musical vocabulary. In his “Philo and the Fathers” (185–186, 199), Ferguson returns to the triple pattern; he also mentions Clement several times. See also Everett Ferguson, “The Active and Contemplative Lives: The Patristic Interpretation of Some Musical Terms,” *SP* 16:2 (1985): 15–23.

124 *Exhortation* 1.1.2.

125 *Exhortation* 1.5.3. This appears to be a theological iteration of Philo’s preference for the natural human voice over manufactured musical instruments, discussed in Ferguson, “Philo and the Fathers,” 190, 198. Maximus the Confessor redrafted this passage in *Chapters on Knowledge* 2.100 (PG 90, 1172D–1173A).

Creation's harmony is invested with a musical potency, that is, to become a polyphonic instrument and/or an orchestra. (Origen picked up the theme of the polyphonic instrument when he said that the human being was called to become a musical instrument in God's hands.¹²⁶) Activating this musical potential is divine agency, which conditions it to express itself as songs of praise. Here, Clement undoubtedly draws on the perception of Philo of the cosmos as song and as musical instrument.¹²⁷ Echoes of Ignatius' "congregational" and liturgical universe are also discernible. In this light, the "natural ode" of the cicadas instantiates the musical condition of the creation. Stapert's disparagement of the cosmic song in favour of other Clementine references to music, mainly anthropological, does not do justice to the textual evidence.¹²⁸

Illustrating the second level of Ferguson's tripartite pattern, Clement reserves a special place for humankind. Gregory of Nyssa and many others followed him in this.¹²⁹ Clement does so in the passage considered here and elsewhere in *Exhortation*. The relevant passage shows that the human microcosm is not only a summary of the whole, manifesting the melodious potential of the cosmos, but is the preferred instrument of the Logos. What motivates this preference is the kind of praise the human being sings—as an ensouled and conscious instrument—contributing to the cosmic liturgy by cultivating a noble lifestyle. While any human being can be a divine instrument, only the perfect person, "the immortal man," becomes so. In the intensely poetical words of Clement, "a beautiful hymn (καλὸς ὕμνος) of God is the immortal man, a house built through righteousness, in whose character the precepts of the truth are

126 Origen's recently discovered *Homilies on the Psalms* iterate this view. The prologue of the second homily on Ps 80 introduces a series of musical instruments which can be well used by one "trained in the musical arts." The image returns within the same prologue as an analogy for all human beings, here depicted as instruments on which God plays "heavenly music." Again following Clement, the true musical instruments of God are the prophets, attuned to the divine will. I used the text edited by Lorenzo Perrone, "*Origenes rediit: la découverte des Homélies sur les Psaumes dans le Cod. Gr. 314 de Munich*," *REAP* 59:1 (2013): 55–93, here 61–62. Similarly, Origen's great admirer, Gregory of Nyssa (*Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 3.30.24–31.16) rehearsed this imagery both anthropologically and cosmologically.

127 For Philo's relevant views, see Ferguson, "The Art of Praise," 414 and "Philo and the Fathers," 186.

128 Stapert, *A New Song*, 58–59. For a contrary view, emphasising the complementarity of the musical instruments in Clement, see Costache, "Meaningful Cosmos," 119–121.

129 For Gregory's insights, see Blowers, *Drama*, 358, and Chapter Seven below. Possibly through Clement, later authors variously adapted Philo's stance on deified Moses as contributor to the wellbeing of the cosmos. See David T. Runia, "God and Man in Philo of Alexandria," *JTS* 39 (1988): 48–75, esp. 53–54.

engraved.”¹³⁰ While the cosmic song consists in the harmonious structure of the universe, the song of a perfect human being is to prioritise divine wisdom and the attainment of virtue.¹³¹ As Ferguson has shown, the symbolic relation between virtue and music was a constant of early Christian discourse.¹³² We encountered this relation in Ignatius’ depiction of the church which praises God in performing acts of virtue. Clement draws on this tradition, and creatively develops it.

Illustrating the third level of Ferguson’s tripartite pattern, Christians are called to replicate the same experience through communion with each other and with God’s Logos. In another passage of *Exhortation*, we read:

Let us hasten towards salvation and rebirth. Let the many (believers) hasten to be gathered together into one love, according to the unity of the single essence. Let us correspondingly pursue unity by doing good, (in this way) seeking out the one and only good. And so, the union of many (believers) brings the varied and scattered voices into a divine harmony (ἁρμονίαν θεϊκὴν), producing one symphony (μία συμφωνία) through obeying one choirmaster and teacher (ἐνὶ χορηγῷ καὶ διδασκάλῳ), the Logos.¹³³

This passage replays the ecclesiology of *Ephesians* 4, which depicts the Christian assembly as a liturgical chorus led by Christ, and whose song comprises the practice of virtue and mutual love. So too for Clement, the *ecclesia* is a “divine harmony” and “one symphony” whose members, spiritually reborn, work towards their “union according to the unity of the single essence” by loving one another and by performing good deeds. In Charles Cosgrove’s words,

130 *Exhortation* 10.107.1. For the cosmological image of the house in the spurious *Clementine Recognitions*, see Barker, *Creation*, 47. Bostock ignores the musical side of the human person in Clement, instead referring to Origen’s iteration of this topic. See Bostock, “Origen and Pythagoreanism,” 474–475.

131 With or without musical connotations, the existential significance of virtue is at the forefront of Clement’s discourse. See Costache, “Being, Well-being, Being for Ever,” 60–63.

132 Ferguson, “A Patristic Theology of Music,” 274–277.

133 *Exhortation* 9.88.2–3. I am grateful to Anna Silvas for improvements on my translation. For notes on this passage, see Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 206. Clement rehearses the topic of this passage in his metaphorical Hymn to Christ. See the text and an English translation in Annewies van den Hoek, “‘Hymn of the Holy Clement to Christ the Saviour’: Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogue* III 101.4,” in *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis: Proceedings of the Colloquium on Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Matyáš Havrda et al., VCSup 117 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 315–322, esp. 319–322. For an appraisal of this hymn, see Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria,” 266–267.

Clement's Christian life is a "perpetual liturgy."¹³⁴ The Logos leads the believers as a choirmaster directs the singers. As such, divinely steered, the beautiful music of their mutual love manifests—to borrow again from *La Matina*¹³⁵—their essence and thus their belonging together. The outcome of their concord, we read in another Clementine work, is the irenic music of the virtuous, called "peaceful instruments," and of the faithful assemblies, called "choirs of peace."¹³⁶ Elsewhere the church expresses its reverence by singing praises to Christ, their guide, through leading a holy life.¹³⁷ In all these cases, following Philo and Ignatius, the virtues, particularly love, are the true song of the Christian society, the *ecclesia*. Clement demonstrated here once again his familiarity with the traditional antecedents, which he weaved skilfully into his evocation of church life.

But *Exhortation* does more than provide examples for Ferguson's three-fold pattern. It also bridges the first and the third levels by associating the "holy and prophetic chorus" and "God's holy mountain." Specifically, the revelation of the celestial truth on the mountain stirs the prophets to praises.¹³⁸ The prophetic choir signifies the church, whereas the mountain—*locus* of revelation—represents the cosmos. As for Ignatius and others, the two witnesses—the church and the cosmos—blend in one complex worldview, theological and musical. The church communion exemplifies the musical harmony within the world and is inseparable from it. Furthermore, the church's prophetic choir translates cosmic revelation into a hymn.

The above representation of the melodious universe echoes the input of Philo, Ignatius, and Irenaeus, which it reorganises originally. But Clement's true originality consists in having added the theme of a God that sings and is a song. At the forefront of this theological iteration is the Logos, Christ himself, the source of cosmic music. Christ is the "Father's symphony and harmony,"¹³⁹ also "God's wholly harmonious, melodious, and sacred instrument,"¹⁴⁰ through

134 Cosgrove, "Clement of Alexandria," 268–269.

135 *La Matina*, "Il Corpo del suono," 111.

136 See the phrase "truly the human being is a peaceful instrument (εἰρηνικὸν ... ὄργανον)" (*The Pedagogue* 2.4.42.1). Cf. the "chorus of peace" (χορὸς εἰρήνης) in *Hymn to Christ the Saviour* 62.

137 *Hymn to Christ the Saviour* 1–10, 40–41.

138 *Exhortation* 1.2.2. Cf. *Exhortation* 1.8.2. The prophetic references have a supersessionist edge, indicating the Christian replacement of older cultural hallmarks. See Runia, "The Pre-Christian Origins," 21.

139 τοῦτο συμφωνία ἐστὶ, τοῦτο ἁρμονία πατρὸς (*Exhortation* 12.120.4).

140 ὄργανόν ἐστι τοῦ θεοῦ πανααρμόνιον, ἐμμελὲς καὶ ἄγιον (*Exhortation* 1.5.4). Cf. *Exhortation* 1.6.1.

whom all things are made.¹⁴¹ But Christ, an uncreated factor, does not work in isolation from the humble cicadas, the mountains of revelation, regular and virtuous people, and the prophetic choirs. Passages such as the one depicting the Logos and the Holy Spirit making use of humankind and the cosmos as musical instruments¹⁴² allude to the synergy of the created and the uncreated factors. The divine music of the “celestial Logos” is played on created instruments, which have their own part to play. Music erupts from everywhere. Elsewhere, Clement refers to the musician Logos who contends “on the stage of the whole cosmos” where he receives the laurel crown.¹⁴³ The universe is the arena where the Logos sets and enacts the principles of created existence; it also is the prize the supreme artist wins for establishing the principles and for singing them through the unfolding of the creation.

Clement returns to the musical activity of the divine agent several lines later. He refers to “my singer,” Christ,¹⁴⁴ depicted as an antitype of Orpheus, the mythical artist whose songs moved and reordered the cosmos. Treating Orpheus and other singers of mythological antiquity¹⁴⁵ as Christ’s symbols is part of a successful strategy to convey the message in culturally adaptive forms.¹⁴⁶ His approach shows missional versatility. This is quite significant if we consider that he expressed reservations about music, songs, and instruments.¹⁴⁷ His position is not uncommon. The concerns about this art and its ethically doubtful aspects were widespread in late antiquity.¹⁴⁸ Here, however, the goals of his discourse demanded a different approach. He therefore represented Christ as the most skilful singer, and the Gospel as the best of songs. I will explore this

141 Osborn (*Clement of Alexandria*, 37–38) found everywhere signs of divine activity, a divine movement towards and within the creation.

142 *Exhortation* 1.5.3.

143 *Exhortation* 1.2.3. For the use of theatrical imagery in Clement, especially in *Exhortation*, see Leonardo Lugaresi, “La natura ‘drammatica’ del mistero cristiano: una nota su Clemente Alessandrino,” in *Il mistero nella carne: Contributi su “Mysterion” e “Sacramentum” nei primi secoli cristiani*, ed. A.M. Mazzanti (Castel Bolognese: Itaca, 2003), 29–45, esp. 40–43.

144 *Exhortation* 1.3.1.

145 *Exhortation* 1.1.1; 1.2.4. See Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 100, 122.

146 Jourdan, “Le Logos et l’empereur,” 321. Stapert, *A New Song*, 49–51.

147 *Exhortation* 1.5.3. Cf. *The Pedagogue* 2.4.40.2; 2.4.41.1–3; 2.4.42.2; 2.4.44.4–5. For Clement’s diatribes against music and musical instruments in *The Pedagogue* and *Exhortation*, see Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria,” 270–276; Ferguson, “Philo and the Fathers,” 197; John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 172, 174, 260.

148 Ferguson, “The Art of Praise,” 407–411. Holleman, “The Oxyrhyncus Papyrus,” 8–11. Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 97–100.

latter theme in the next two sections. It is noteworthy that Clement's strategy is grounded in sound discernment and in the church's pastoral experience. He implies elsewhere that only the frivolous pursuits associated with music must be shunned, not music itself. The church assembly, for instance, uses music for such fitting purposes as guiding souls towards virtuous living and for glorifying God.¹⁴⁹ Here, it seems, he echoes the philosophical view of music as preparation for life.¹⁵⁰

Leaving Orpheus and other mythical artists behind, what establishes and secures the cosmic being, melodic order, and meaningfulness is the divine song of the Logos. Christ's *music-making*, to paraphrase La Matina again, is *world-making*.¹⁵¹ The music of this uncreated, "peaceful instrument" of God, the Logos,¹⁵² we read elsewhere, is the ultimate foundation of the universe and the crucial factor of its organisation. To paraphrase Barnes and Lewis, no wonder all things sing; no wonder there is a "music of the atoms," regardless of how we perceive it.¹⁵³ As we read, the Logos "melodiously arrayed the universe (τὸ πᾶν ἐκόσμησεν ἑμμελῶς) by stretching (ἐνέτεινε) the disharmony (διαφωνίαν) of the fundamental elements into the order of a symphony (τάξιν συμφωνίας)."¹⁵⁴

The action of stretching the fundamental elements like the strings of an instrument reminds us of Irenaeus' analogy of the lyre, who compared the ordered universe and the harmony of the lyre's cords.¹⁵⁵ The difference is that Clement focuses upon the ordering activity of the Logos, as attuning the strings of reality, not on cosmic harmony. In so doing, and as his use of ἐντείνω suggests, he taps into Plato's cosmology.¹⁵⁶ However, the result of that activity—namely, a harmonious cosmos—evokes the beauty of the lyre's music. The excerpt also shows what the activity itself is by means of a metaphor. The Logos *stretches*—tones, tautens, tunes—the cords of reality and plays the elements of the uni-

149 *The Pedagogue* 2.4.41.4–5; 2.4.42.1,3; 2.4.43.2–3; 2.4.44.1–2.

150 See La Matina, "Il Corpo del suono," 105–107. The philosophical preparation for life entailed a range of "spiritual exercises," including singing. For a recent review of such practices in a Christian ascetic setting, see Neil et al., *Dreams*, 88–93.

151 Marcello La Matina, *L'accadere del suono: Musica, significante e forme di vita*, PFE 5 (Milano: Mimesis, 2017), 30, 42–43.

152 εἰρηγικὸν ὄργανον ("peaceful instrument"; *The Pedagogue* 2.4.42.3). For the image of the Logos harmonising the creation in *Exhortation*, see Matteo Monfrinotti, *Creatore e creazione: Il pensiero di Clemente Alessandrino*, FN (Roma: Città Nuova, 2015), 128–139.

153 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 48–51, 62.

154 *Exhortation* 1.5.1.

155 *Heresies* 2.25.2.

156 I owe this information to David Runia, who explained to me that the metaphor of stretching goes back to Plato's world-soul in *Timaeus* 34b4; especially in 35a the image contributes to the metaphor of musical harmony.

verse into a symphony. A cosmologist of our age would appreciate the idea of the universe's tuned strings that make reality what it is.¹⁵⁷ He or she might not favour the reference to a divine agent, but this is not always the case. Perhaps as a figure of speech, still, Michio Kaku does not shy away from talking about God in this connection: "the universe is a symphony of strings; and the mind of God can be viewed as cosmic music vibrating through hyperspace."¹⁵⁸ Regardless of the theological aptness of this statement—or lack thereof—Clement would have been thrilled to read it.

The quoted sentence shows that the fundamental elements of reality are naturally in disarray (see *διαφωνία*, "disharmony") and unable to attain order (*τάξις*) by themselves. There is no music of the spheres in a universe void of the divine presence. The active presence of the Logos is salvific. As we shall discover later in Chapter Two and again in Chapter Six, Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa were of the same view. What matters for now is that Clement's sentence adds a fresh nuance to what we already knew. Earlier we discussed an excerpt on the Logos harmonising the cosmos through the Holy Spirit, where the creation—mirroring the lyre of Irenaeus—appears as a musical instrument (*ὄργανον*).¹⁵⁹ Here, being "melodiously arrayed" (*ἐμμελῶς*), the cosmos is a symphony (*συμφωνία*), the music of the strings, the music of the spheres. Founded on the song of the Logos, the universe itself is melody, the artist's laurel crown.¹⁶⁰ And while one might discern echoes from Ignatius' reorganised starfield here, to my knowledge the idea of the cosmos as melody and symphony was never stated before with so much force in the patristic discourse. Clement would have wholeheartedly agreed with La Matina that the universe and its constituents are the creator's music.¹⁶¹

We retain the complex representation of the Logos as composer, singer, song, and musical instrument. Clement depicted the cosmos and everything within it—including the virtuous human being and the church's prophetic choir—in much the same way. Thus, the creation and all things within it are singers, musicians, instruments, choirs, and songs.

The soteriological underpinning of Clement's thinking has already been noted. He views the nexus between the Logos and the cosmos as divine provi-

157 For a musical rendition of string theory, see Michio Kaku, *Parallel Worlds: A Journey Through Creation, Higher Dimensions, and the Future of the Cosmos* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 17–18, 196–198.

158 Kaku, *Parallel Worlds*, 356.

159 *Exhortation* 1.5.3.

160 *Exhortation* 1.2.3.

161 La Matina, *L'accadere del suono*, 43.

dence and as salvation. In what follows, I consider in detail the divine impact upon the melodic architecture of the creation, on the cosmic as well as the soteriological plane.

3.2 *The Pure Song*

The same divine agency establishes connections between the Logos and the creation, signified by the “eternal song” or the “pure song” of natural laws,¹⁶² and between the Logos incarnate, Christ, and the renewed creation, signified by the Gospel’s “new song.”¹⁶³ In regard to the first connection, Clement mentions a foundational song—or fractal, one would say—that reverberates back and forth throughout the universe. In his words, of profound Platonic resonance,

This pure song (τὸ ἄσμα τὸ ἀκήρατον), the support of the whole and the harmony of all (ἔρεισμα τῶν ὅλων καὶ ἀρμονία τῶν πάντων), brought this universe to a harmonious measure (ἡρμόσατο) by expanding from centres to boundaries and from extremities to things in the middle ... according to God’s fatherly intention.¹⁶⁴

Earlier we discovered that the Logos shapes the cosmos through the Holy Spirit for the praising of God, and that the creation, fundamentally pacified through this divine activity, is transformed from chaos and disharmony into a pleasant music. The result is cosmic harmony.¹⁶⁵ The above passage presents another profound insight into the workings of divine providence within the universe.

Divine activity originates in the intention of the Father, while the Logos—here called “this pure song”—accomplishes “the fatherly intention” within the cosmos. The agent whose song organises the world is, again, the Logos who sings the universe into being, attuning its infrastructural strings. Clement designates once more his activity with a musical metaphor: it is a pure (ἀκήρατος), unadulterated song, pristine and original as it were. The song of the Logos is the fundamental pattern and the ordering force of the cosmos, *sine qua non*. Reaching everywhere—“from centres to boundaries and from extremities to things in the middle”—the patterned waves of the “pure song” configure

¹⁶² See Costache, “Meaningful Cosmos,” 115–122.

¹⁶³ See Costache, “Meaningful Cosmos,” 122–128. For the two overlapping songs, briefly, see Monfrinotti, *Creatore e creazione*, 130–131. Osborn (*Clement of Alexandria*, 32–33) observes that the convergence of these songs denotes the coherence of divine economy.

¹⁶⁴ *Exhortation* 1.5.2. See also *Exhortation* 1.5.1.

¹⁶⁵ ἀρμονία (*Exhortation* 1.5.1). See Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 207.

the multiplicity of the universe into a dynamically attuned and convergent reality, bringing all things into the “harmonious measure” (ἁρμόζω) of God’s will.

This is not the first time we encounter the concept of cosmic harmonisation. In a passage previously considered, Clement mentions the organising function of the Logos and the Spirit in terms of attuning the microcosm and the macrocosm, humankind and the universe.¹⁶⁶ Elsewhere he qualifies harmony further by referring to the “measure and number of all things” (μέτρον καὶ ἀριθμὸν τῶν ὅλων).¹⁶⁷ The phrase echoes a Pythagorean motif¹⁶⁸ rehearsed in Wis 11:20¹⁶⁹ and in Philo,¹⁷⁰ and also the Johannine view of the Logos as the common measure of all things created.¹⁷¹ It also is reminiscent of the Disciple’s “boundaries” (ὅροι) and “measures” (μέτρα) of the divinely “organised, defined, and connected” universe.¹⁷²

Against this backdrop, the “harmonious measure” or the “measure and number” of created reality amounts to a theological iteration of what modern cosmologists would call big numbers or constants of nature,¹⁷³ natural laws, and fractal patterns.¹⁷⁴ It is these numbers or beats of the “pure song” of the Logos—encoding the “fatherly intention” or the divine thoughts—that make all things emerge into existence and converge in meaningful harmony.¹⁷⁵ Theological

¹⁶⁶ *Exhortation* 1.5.3.

¹⁶⁷ *Exhortation* 6.69.2. Similarly, Athanasius seems to have hinted at the numbers of nature as a divine code which points to God, at least when his sentence is taken literally. See his rhetorical question, “who would represent the Father numerically in order to find out the powers of his Logos?” *Gentiles* 47.1–2.

¹⁶⁸ The Pythagorean resonance of this phrase is indeed uncanny. For the Pythagorean numbers of nature, see Barrow, *The Constants of Nature*, 67–71 and Maor, *Music by the Numbers*, 15.

¹⁶⁹ πάντα μέτρῳ καὶ ἀριθμῷ καὶ σταθμῷ διέταξας (“you arranged all things by measure and number and weight”).

¹⁷⁰ See David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*, *PhilAnt* 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 466–467. Cf. van Winden, “Quotations from Philo,” 208–209, 210.

¹⁷¹ In John 11–3, the λόγος features as source and measure of all things which could not exist without divine input.

¹⁷² *Diognetus* 7.2.

¹⁷³ See Barrow, *The Constants of Nature*, 97–118.

¹⁷⁴ See the classical work of Benoît Mandelbrot, *Les objets fractals: forme, hasard et dimension*, revised fourth edn (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 124–134. See also Michael Frame and Amelia Urry, *Fractal Worlds: Grown, Built, and Imagined* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 55–88.

¹⁷⁵ *Exhortation* 1.5.3.4. See Costache, “Meaningful Cosmos,” 117–121. For Philo’s corresponding views, which surely influenced Clement, see David T. Runia, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, *CSS* 332 (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), 8–9.

connotations, writ large, stamp the natural laws.¹⁷⁶ And since cosmic numbers overlap with the letters of divine revelation—of course, I speculate about the fact that Clement used an alphabet whose letters were also numbers—providence and revelation are intimately linked. Divine providence, which establishes and preserves cosmic order, therefore channels divine knowledge. This view, consistent with Irenaeus' perception of creation's harmony as pointing to God the creator, anticipates Athanasius' "syntactic" rendition of cosmic order.

The passage under consideration is pivotal for understanding Clement's worldview. It calls attention to the omnipresence of the divine input, denoted by the foundational "pure song" which reverberates throughout the cosmos, from side to side. It suggests that the "pure song" embeds the divine measure (μέτρον καὶ ἀριθμὸν) in the infrastructure of the universe; in other words, the numbers of nature. It also reveals the dynamics of a cohering universe whose complex order is in the making. It suggests that cosmic existence has a certain directionality. The permeating divine input impresses a certain tenor—a spin—on the matrix and movement of the universe. Inherently logocentric, and akin to the Diognesian world,¹⁷⁷ Clement's universe is theocentric in orientation. The "pure song" imprints on it a divine purposefulness, "God's fatherly intention." Ultimately, the "pure song" or the fractal melody of the Logos is a divine revelation whose embodiment is the ordered universe. This conclusion accords with my earlier finding, that Clement's cosmos is a theologically meaningful music.

To conclude this section, it is noteworthy that the divine activity, viewed as a cosmic melody, establishes an ordered, harmonious, and meaningful universe. Complex factors—divine and created instruments attuned to one another as one orchestra—secure cosmic harmony. The cosmos itself is a song that reveals the divine presence and spells out God's intentions. Elsewhere we see how faith in the Logos incarnate, Christ,¹⁷⁸ together with scriptural testimonies,¹⁷⁹ clarify the content of cosmic music. Interestingly, to portray Antony as a Christian philosopher steeped in natural contemplation, Athanasius likewise believed that faith and scriptural wisdom confirm cosmic revelation.¹⁸⁰ But this authen-

176 See Costache, "Meaningful Cosmos," 108–111, 125–129. Interestingly, Sagan concluded his fictional work, *Contact*, 371, by interpreting the numbers of nature as denoting a purposeful universe whose parameters reveal the signature of its maker.

177 See the analysis of *Diognetus* 7.2 in Chapter One above.

178 *Exhortation* 11.112.1.

179 *Exhortation* 8.77–81. Blowers (*Drama of Divine Economy*, 317) notices the presence of both witnesses in *The Pedagogue* and in *Stromateis*.

180 *Life* 75.4.14–18; 78.1.3–4.

ticating framework goes back to Ignatius and Irenaeus, who sought support for their takes on the meaningful cosmos by comparing it with the church and the Scriptures. Other correspondences can be drawn between Clement and his predecessors. The image of the cosmos as a musical instrument whose strings are attuned by the Logos evokes Irenaeus' analogy of the lyre. In turn, the image of the doxological ode sung by many cosmic voices echoes the celestial bodies of the Ignatian Starhymn. Nevertheless, in elaborating on the orchestral universe and the cosmos as a song—or, to paraphrase Barnes and Lewis, representing the beautiful universe by way of a beautiful theory¹⁸¹—Clement conveyed creation's melodious nature with much more conviction than any of his predecessors.

This depiction of cosmic reality anticipates the soteriological aspect of Clement's worldview, to which I must now turn.

3.3 *The New Song*

To express the relationship of the Logos incarnate and the renewed creation, *Exhortation* deploys similar metaphors. As Cosgrove states, Clement's "musical cosmology ... imparts a musical aspect to his soteriology."¹⁸² At the centre of this soteriological narrative is Christ the singer who intones a "new song"¹⁸³ and a "celestial ode,"¹⁸⁴ which give a different expression to the "eternal law of a new harmony."¹⁸⁵ This string of images is intensely metaphorical, evocative of Ignatius' starfield whose dance followed a different rhythm. Clement's "new song" and the "new harmony" signify Christ's Gospel, viewed as a novel, tuneful, and climactic iteration of the "eternal law." The latter, in turn, is the "pure song" that establishes the universe. Nevertheless, by recasting the eternal song, this novel tune—"my salvific song,"¹⁸⁶ as Clement appropriates it—is not only new. It is both old and new, the "eternal law" remade into a "new harmony." This paradoxical reference to the Gospel as old and new replays the Diognetian definition of Christianity as a "new race" faithful to the oldest, foundational ordinances of the Logos. In like manner, Christ's Gospel reveals the foundational truth of created reality—the "eternal law" or the "pure song"—bringing

181 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 13.

182 Cosgrove, "Clement of Alexandria," 280.

183 *Exhortation* 1.6.5.

184 *Exhortation* 1.4.3.

185 *Exhortation* 1.2.4. For Clement's presentation of Christianity as old and new, see Rhee, *Early Christian Literature*, 68–69 and Runia, "The Pre-Christian Origins," 21–22.

186 *Exhortation* 1.6.3.

the joyful tidings of a lifestyle that leads God's people towards the eschaton. The following passage illustrates this very understanding:

This is the new song (τὸ ἄσμα τὸ καινόν), the revelation that now shines upon us, of the Logos who was in the beginning and preexisted. The pre-existent saviour became lately manifest. The one who truly is (for "the Logos turned towards God")¹⁸⁷ revealed himself to us as teacher. The Logos who made all things became manifest. In the beginning, as demiurge, he bestowed (upon us) the power of life after (our) moulding. Now being shown to us (through the incarnation), he as teacher taught (us) how to live well, so that as God he may bestow (on us) later the power to live forever.¹⁸⁸

Taking as a starting point his favourite psalmic metaphor, the "new song," Clement sketches a dynamic revelation that permeates all the ages of creation's history. It originates in the past, impacts the present, and reaches out into the future. The setting and the language of this excerpt evoke late antiquity's mystery or initiation religions.¹⁸⁹ The agent of salvation, the Logos incarnate, reveals himself to the world, gradually, as creator, teacher, and God. These attributes correspond to three aspects of the "new song," as the source of life, ethical teaching, and power of immortality. Christ's "new song" overlaps therefore with the "pure song" of the Logos as creation's foundational law. It is the oldest tune as it were, now rendered under the guise of a new existential beat and harmony. Its ultimate climax, immortality, will be revealed only later, at the eschaton. So understood, Christ's "new song" supports the entire cosmic existence from beginning to end. It is a diachronic activity that operates throughout history as a *cantus firmus* for all the varied songs of the cosmos, past, present, and future. Old and new—both an "eternal law" and a "salvific song"—the "new song" of the Gospel restores and clarifies both creation's finality and the purpose of human existence.

Given the identity of the divine agent as both creator and saviour, the Logos incarnate's "new song" reveals that the creation is encoded from the outset with the signs of divine wisdom. In order to grasp the nature and purpose of the

187 This is my "relational" rendition of the famous phrase ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν in John 1:1.

188 *Exhortation* 1.7.3. Cf. *Exhortation* 1.7.1. For a different approach to this passage, see Costache, "Being," 57–59.

189 Lugaresi, "La natura 'drammatica' del mistero cristiano," 40–42. Closer, it might evoke the eschatological orientation of the early Christian liturgy. For the complexities of liturgical eschatology, see Rouwhorst, "How Eschatological Was Early Christian Liturgy?" 96–107.

cosmos—enshrined in the “eternal law” and the “pure song” of the creation—one must hear therefore Christ’s “new song,” the Gospel. It is a “celestial ode.” It has authority from on high. It is an authenticated iteration of the foundational “pure song” originating, as Clement says elsewhere, in Christ’s omniscience.¹⁹⁰ In stating this Clement makes a strategic point against Christianity’s critics who contended that, fumbling in the dark, new religions had no contribution to make to human wisdom. For him, Christ’s “new song” *precedes* any religion: it coincides with creation’s original, foundational truth, corraling in the entire meaning and purpose of the universe.

Clement produced a corresponding Christian representation of reality, itself old and new. This worldview displays elements encountered in the Scriptures, in Plato, Philo, Ignatius, and Irenaeus, and thus it is old. However, by connecting the creator, the cosmos, the Gospel, the Scriptures more broadly, the church, and human culture and existence into one, complex, and meaningful worldview, it is new.¹⁹¹ This is a Christian narrative of everything characterised by soteriological overtones and complemented by existential, ethical, and eschatological underpinnings.

To sum up these findings, Clement metaphorically proposed that the primary source of cosmic existence, God the Father, *sings* the foundations of the universe into being through his Logos who, in the Holy Spirit, stirs to song the polyphonic instrument of the world. The outcome is a musical cosmos, a liturgical symphony where all factors—created and uncreated—play their part, mobilising the negentropic universe towards increasing harmony and complex order. This cosmic music is theologically meaningful: it continuously replays the fractal “pure song” of the origins or the “eternal law,” even the foundational message of the Logos. The “new song” of the Gospel, reiterating the original soundtrack of creation, discloses, confirms, and clarifies the meaningfulness of the universe. Beyond the metaphors, Clement’s musical worldview aspires to a complete Christian representation of reality, a narrative of everything, helping to move cosmology from the outskirts into the centre of Christian theology.

Athanasius, to whom I must now turn, selectively and creatively repeated this synthesis. I shall return to other aspects of their contributions in Chapters Three and Four below.

190 Christ revealed to the saints what the created beings presently are, what the future things will be, and how the things that have been brought into being came to be. See *Stromateis* 6.9.78.5–6.

191 For more on these connections, see Costache, “Meaningful Cosmos,” 123–125.

4 Athanasius

In the footsteps of his predecessors, Pantaenus, Clement, Origen, and Dionysius,¹⁹² who developed the tradition of Christian apologetics in significant ways, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria and a great polemicist, wrote apologetic works. The treatise relevant here is *Gentiles*.¹⁹³ As noted above, he aimed it at a hesitant Christian intelligentsia rather than at the Gospel's detractors. There is therefore a perfect agreement between Athanasius' *Gentiles* and Clement's *Exhortation*. Although Athanasius wrote at a time when Christianity was no longer an illicit religion, his purposes largely coincided with Clement's.

In the historical and cultural circumstances that culminated in the restoration of paganism under Julian (d. 363), there were educated Christians for whom the Gospel and the classical culture were difficult to reconcile. The impasse which these Christians experienced demanded a discourse that articulated the faith in an intelligent and elegant idiom. Musical and other cultural tropes were once again required. This is another point of similarity between *Gentiles* and *Exhortation*, since both represent reality—together with other devices—by way of musical images and terms. Furthermore, both writings show a particular interest in cosmological matters. Of relevance to the literary context considered here,¹⁹⁴ Athanasius focuses on the Logos as the centre of reality and on providence as a structuring and revelatory activity within the creation. His argument is straightforward: the complex and diversified cosmos—ordered, beautiful, and meaningful—points to the Logos as its organising agent.¹⁹⁵ These are clear echoes of Clement's approach.

192 Clelia Martínez Maza, "Christian Paideia in Early Imperial Alexandria," in *The Alexandrian Tradition: Interactions between Science, Religion, and Literature*, ed. Luis Arturo Guichard et al., RCE 28 (Bern and Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014), 211–231, esp. 222–223.

193 For a summary of this work and its sequel, *Incarnation*, see Andrew Louth, "The fourth-century Alexandrians: Athanasius and Didymus," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 275–282, esp. 276–277. The most extensive analysis of this writing is Meijering's in *Athanasius*. Various other scholars undertook to explore this Athanasian work. Behr, *Christian Theology*, 2.1:168–184. Doru Costache, "Logos și creație în teologia sfântului Atanasie cel Mare," *Glasul Bisericii* 3–4 (1994): 51–74. David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*, CTC (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66–68. Uta Heil, "Das apologetische Doppelwerk," in *Athanasius Hanbuch*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 166–175, esp. 168–169. Thomson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, xx–xxiv.

194 *Gentiles* 35–47. For an analysis of these chapters, see Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 31–40.

195 This focus did not escape contemporary scholars. Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 48–49. Blowers, *Drama*, 319. Heil, "Apologetische Dop-

In what follows I consider the Athanasian use of melodic imagery in *Gentiles* 38, 42, and 43. The material unfolds in two chiasitic structures. So far, *Gentiles*' melodic illustrations and phraseology have largely passed unremarked by scholars.¹⁹⁶

4.1 *The Analogy of the Lyre*

To begin with, it is noteworthy that both chapters 38 and 43 introduce three almost identical analogies each, which are all intended to illustrate the providential activity of the Logos in the universe. The two chapters display the analogies as though in a mirror, symmetrically, according to a chiasitic pattern shown in Table 1. Eginhard P. Meijering pointed out the correspondence of chapters 38 and 43, but, possibly because of taking *Gentiles* 35–39 as a compact whole,¹⁹⁷ he did not notice their chiasitic structure. True, Athanasius does not indicate any intention to present the relevant information in such a way, leaving a sizeable space between the two chapters. That said, their symmetry is inescapable.

In this sequence *Gentiles* 38 introduces a societal analogy, an anthropological one, and a musical one. The three images refer, respectively, to the order of a city which points to its ruler's authority and activity,¹⁹⁸ the consistency of the body which reveals the soul's activity,¹⁹⁹ and the harmonious sound of the lyre which shows the musician's skill.²⁰⁰ After presenting the three images, Athanasius concludes that in the same manner the harmony of the cosmos reveals

pelwerk," 169. Alvyn Pettersen, *Athanasius*, OCT (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 26–28. Adolf Martin Ritter, "Christus der Logos," in *Athanasius Handbuch*, 299–310, esp. 301. Thomas G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 21–22.

196 Stapert, *A New Song*, referred only to one Athanasian writing, *Letter to Marcellinus*, and never directly. Ferguson ("Philo and the Fathers," 194) quoted one passage from the same letter and referred to *Gentiles* 31. In turn, Leithart briefly mentioned several analogies. See Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius*, FTECS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 99. For a little more than that, see Jon M. Robertson, *Christ as Mediator: A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra, and Athanasius of Alexandria*, OTM (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 142–143. A comprehensive catalogue of musical passages in Athanasius appears in McKinnon, *Music in early Christian literature*, 52–56.

197 Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 37.

198 *Gentiles* 38.7–17. For the soteriological echoes of this analogy, see *Incarnation* 9.17–22, 10.2–11. It is possible that the analogy of the king/ruler and the city draws on Philo's corresponding image. See Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 195–196.

199 *Gentiles* 38.17–23.

200 *Gentiles* 38.35–42. Cf. 39.32–33 and 42.22–28. The same analogy of the lyre appears earlier as a simile for the harmonious functioning of the senses, in *Gentiles* 31.24–37 and 32.11–12, perhaps an echo of Origen's approach, earlier mentioned. See a brief reference to this last image in Ferguson, "A Patristic Theology of Music," 276–277.

TABLE 1 A chiastic structure

Chapter	Chiastic symmetry	Content	Type of analogy
38	1	The order of a city points to the active presence of its ruler	Societal
	2	The consistency of the body reveals the activity of the soul	Anthropological
	3	The harmonious sound of a lyre indicates the skills of the musician	Musical
38 and 43		The Logos rules over all	Meaningful axis
43	3	The polyphonic choir is led by its choirmaster	Musical
	2	The soul secures the good functioning of the body	Anthropological
	1	The king puts in motion the activity of the city	Societal

the Logos as “master and king of the entire creation.”²⁰¹ Chapter 43 arrives at the same conclusion spelled out in different words.²⁰² This shared conclusion represents the meaningful axis of the chiastic structure that the two chapters constitute. In turn, chapter 43 introduces first the musical analogy,²⁰³ then the anthropological one,²⁰⁴ and finally the societal one.²⁰⁵ The symmetry of the two chapters is broken by the fact that, whereas the anthropological and the societal analogies coincide perfectly, the musical illustrations differ. Chapter 38 speaks of the lyre and the musician, whereas chapter 43 replaces this with the analogy of a choir and its choirmaster. Another way in which the two chapters are slightly out of sync is that while chapter 38 moves inductively, from the effect to the cause, chapter 43 proceeds deductively, from the cause to the effect. As such, they complement each other. This shift of approach—while it brings to the fore the logical prowess of the author—is nevertheless consistent with the rules of chiastic structures, which present the content in a mirror. The chiastic symmetry of the two chapters holds.

As he does not advertise the presence of this chiasmus, Athanasius offers no hints as to its purpose either. One may legitimately assume that it means to

²⁰¹ *Gentiles* 38.46.

²⁰² *Gentiles* 43.26–27.

²⁰³ *Gentiles* 43.1–7.

²⁰⁴ *Gentiles* 43.7–12.

²⁰⁵ *Gentiles* 43.12–32.

enforce the conclusion that the Logos rules over all as provident God. At least, this would be the logic of a chiasmic arrangement.²⁰⁶ We shall discover shortly that within *Gentiles* this structure is doubled by another and simpler chiasmic construct.

Before considering the relevant passages, we note that the above summarise and echo familiar topics. Chapter 38 seems to draw on such traditional antecedents as the Irenaeian analogy of the lyre and possibly also the Clementine polyphonic instrument. Chapter 43 reuses the Philonian and Ignatian chorus imagery. The shared conclusion of the two chapters is reminiscent of Irenaeus' point about "the one and the same artist and maker."²⁰⁷ When taken together, the musical images in the Athanasian chiasmus suggest a perception of the universe as meaningful and melodious, which corresponds to Clement's worldview. Athanasius shows a preference for musical terms such as "harmony" (ἁρμονία) and "symphony" (συμφωνία), and their field, which he sometimes combines within the same sentence.²⁰⁸ These words, iterating the vocabulary encountered in the antecedents earlier discussed, give the real measure of his musical sensibility. It is against this backdrop that his relevant analogies must be considered. The time has come to take a closer look at these passages.

In *Gentiles* 38, Athanasius follows the inductive approach in order to obtain the cause from its effect. Thus he employs the analogy of the lyre to highlight the musician rather than the song and the instrument on which it was played, or in other words, the Logos rather than the melodious universe. The passage reads as follows:

When one hears from a distance a lyre made of many and varied (ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων) strings, and marvels at the harmony of its converging sounds (τὴν ἁρμονίαν τῆς συμφωνίας), ... even without seeing the musician (one can infer) that there is someone who expertly combines the sound of each string into a melodious concord (ἐναρμόνιον συμφωνίαν). Likewise, given the perfectly harmonious order (παναρμονίου τῆς τάξεως) within the whole cosmos ... and the one perfect order of all things (μιάς τῶν πάντων ἀποτελουμένης τάξεως), it follows that should be conceived one ... master

206 See John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 87–158.

207 *Heresies* 2.25.2. On the Irenaeian roots of Athanasius' Logos-theory, see Ritter, "Christus der Logos," 301–302.

208 For ἁρμονία (harmony) and its variations, see *Gentiles* 36.2; 37.27; 38.3,22,37,41,43; 40.2; 42.9,22,38. For συμφωνία (symphony) and its variations, see *Gentiles* 36.1; 38.37,42; 39.32; 42.9.

and king of the entire creation who by his light shines upon all things (τὸν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ φωτὶ τὰ πάντα καταλάμποντα) and moves them.²⁰⁹

Mark the recurrent combination of the words *ἁρμονία* and *συμφωνία* for both terms of the analogy. The passage rehearses Clement's depiction of the song of the Logos that brings together in harmony the many strands of reality. It also replays the inference of the musician from the harmonious sound of the lyre, found in Irenaeus, concatenating in its opening line (ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων) two phrases from the excerpt analysed above.²¹⁰ Furthermore, the last line of the passage (τὸν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ φωτὶ τὰ πάντα καταλάμποντα) brings to mind Ignatius' Starhymn, which refers to the light of the nativity star which overshadowed the eons.²¹¹ Athanasius and Ignatius convey the same message.

Also, the final line of the passage under consideration offers a counterpoint to the Ignatian view of the incarnation as causing wonderment to the eons.²¹² The allegory of the heavenly turmoil, by which Ignatius introduces cosmic salvation, is here replaced by a direct reference to the Logos as the provident agent who moves all things. After three centuries of Christian history and in a time of relative peace, Athanasius feels no need to sugarcoat his conviction that the incarnation reverberates on a cosmic scale. Either way, his command and skilful replaying of patristic motifs—typical for the ancients' trained memory²¹³—is impressive. It evokes the traditional way of collating scriptural passages within patristic discourse.²¹⁴

Athanasius' lyre suggests the melodious nature of cosmic order. But perhaps more convincing than this analogy is his ample deployment of musical terms such as *ἁρμονία* and *συμφωνία* in cosmological contexts. At close inspection, the inductive approach taken in the above passage does not convey a melodious universe straightforwardly. One notices a tension between the designation of the world as harmonious and symphonic, and the excerpt cited above that shows only an indirect interest in the melodious architecture of the universe. The passage takes both the beautiful song of the lyre and the order of the cosmos as denoting the existence of the musician²¹⁵ and the organising agent, the

209 *Gentiles* 38.35–47. See Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 33.

210 *Heresies* 2.25.2.

211 In the Starhymn, "whose light surpassed all the others" (*Ephesians* 19.2).

212 In the Starhymn, "there was disturbance as to the source of this novelty and unlikeliness to them" (*Ephesians* 19.2).

213 I am grateful to David Runia for this insight.

214 Trigg, "The Apostolic Fathers and Apologists," 305.

215 For a similar use of the analogy of the lyre, see *Gentiles* 47.24–26, where the instrument points to the existence of its maker.

TABLE 2 Another chiastic structure

Chapter	Analogy	Message
38	The harmonious sound of a lyre indicates the skills of a musician	Cosmic order points to the activity of one organising agent, the Logos of God
42	The skills of the musician produce harmonious sounds by way of the lyre	The organising agent, the Wisdom of God, makes possible cosmic order

Logos. The latter is the provident king of the universe. This concern—which the earlier church fathers variously shared—should not come as a surprise. They all viewed the world as melodious, it is true, but due to their apologetic interests they used this representation in order to affirm one God, creator and provident. This was because of the need to counteract the dominant polytheistic narrative of their times. Their formulation of the Christian worldview, indeed, cannot be dissociated from this principal interest. Their approach echoes Gen 1, which begins by affirming the maker of all things and then treats the creator’s relation to the created. The Creed of Nicaea, which Athanasius fiercely defended throughout his life, enshrines the same theological focus.²¹⁶ On this note, I must now turn to another case of the lyre analogy.

Within *Gentiles* the above passage is not the only cosmological setting where Athanasius made use of the analogy of the lyre. He ingeniously returned to it in chapter 42, aiming to construe the proof as in a mirror, deductively, from the organising agent to the cosmic order. With chapters 38 and 42 he crafted another and simpler chiasmus—which Table 2 represents schematically—embedded in the broader and more complex one analysed above.

Turning to the relevant portion of *Gentiles* 42, the divine factor is shown bringing the varied elements of the universe into harmony. While the passage makes use of the feminine gender Wisdom, σοφία, it refers to it in the masculine (see τῷ ἑαυτοῦ νεύματι), signifying thereby the same agency of the Logos.

In the same way that someone produces a meaningful melody (σημαινόμενον μέλος) by musically tuning (μουσικὸς ἀρμολύμενος) a lyre—with skill bringing into accord (συναγαγών) the low tones and the high, also the intermediate and the other sounds—the Wisdom of God brings forth beautifully and harmoniously (ἀποτελεῖ καλῶς καὶ ἡρμολύμενος) one cos-

216 See Costache, “The Orthodox Doctrine of Creation,” 49.

mos and one order (ἓνα τὸν κόσμον καὶ μίαν τὴν τάξιν) by plying the universe as though a lyre. Thus he brings together (συναγαγών) things in the air and things on earth, also things in the sky and things in the air, gathering and combining (συνάπτων καὶ περιάγων) the wholes with the parts, and making them turn about by his nod (τῷ ἑαυτοῦ νεύματι) and will.²¹⁷

Note, once again, the vocabulary of “harmony,” here rendered in verbal and adverbial forms derived from ἀρμόζω, which links together this passage and the previous one. The second, cosmological half of the passage echoes the Philonian and Clementine image of the song of the Logos reverberating back and forth through the various layers of reality. The passage reminds also of the Irenaeian intervals pertaining to the sounds of the lyre, typifying the consonance of the various levels of one creation. As a distant echo of the same approach, but without recourse to the analogy of the lyre, Maximus contemplates diversity and unity within both the cosmos and the church.²¹⁸ It is of particular interest that the above passage endorses the conclusion drawn from the analogy of the lyre in *Gentiles* 38, that the agency of the Logos effects the ordered unity of an otherwise diverse and scattered creation. The difference consists in the unequivocal designation of the universe, here, as a musical instrument, a lyre, whereas in *Gentiles* 38 this nuance recedes before the focus on the musician.

Athanasius arrives at this designation by likening the three regions of the cosmos (sky, air, and earth) to the lyre’s three kinds of sound (low, intermediary, and high notes). His universe is as physical as the Disciple’s and Aristides’ are. Implicitly, Athanasius associates the low tones and the earth, the median tones and the air, and finally the high tones and the sky. So understood, the two terms of this comparison—the lyre and the cosmos—become interchangeable, corresponding to Ignatius’ cosmos and liturgical church as singing communities. It follows that one could therefore speak of earthly, aerial, and celestial musical notes as well as low, median, and high cosmic regions. Being gathered (συνάγω, συνάπτω, περιάγω), structured (cf. ἀποτελεῖ μίαν τάξιν), and harmonised (ἀρμόζω) at the will of the divine musician, the universe—earth, air, and sky, with all its wholes and parts—is turned into a musical instrument which is played by the Wisdom of God. The divine agent’s will finds expression in the command or the nod mentioned at the end of the passage.

As for Clement, so music supplied Athanasius with fitting analogies for the divine agency and for the elements of the cosmos, including for comparing

²¹⁷ *Gentiles* 42.22–28.

²¹⁸ *The Mystagogy* 1.187–198.

the universe with an instrument, the lyre. Apart from this similarity, however, the Athanasian analogy of the lyre in *Gentiles* 38 and 42 does not present the universe as a melody, at least not explicitly. His depiction of reality therefore is less metaphorical than Clement's. From a different angle, it is noteworthy that Athanasius iterates the physical universe of Ignatius, Aristides, *Diognetus*, and Irenaeus, and that in so doing contributes to the articulation of a Christian worldview at the crossing of theology and the available sciences.

4.2 *The Analogy of the Choir*

A more transparent description of the melodious cosmos—but not as intense as Clement's telling metaphors—occurs in Athanasius' reference to the "image of a great choir." To this I must now turn.

As we have seen above, *Gentiles* 43 mirrors *Gentiles* 38, each with three analogies of the cosmic order dependent on God's Logos. The first of these analogies speaks of a great choir composed of singers who vary in gender and age yet bring forth a single harmony under the direction of the one choirmaster. Here is the passage in question, to which I add the conclusion of the chapter.

That this might be understood (i.e. the Logos organising all things) through an example, let us refer to the image of a great choir. Such a choir is composed of a variety of people, men, children, women, elderly as well as youngsters. At the sign of the choirmaster (καθηγεμόνος), they sing according to their nature and aptitude—the man as a man, the child as a child, the elderly person as an elderly one, the young person as a young one—and all together bring forth one melody ... The same goes for the creation in its entirety, even though, the example being weak, one must generalise the notion. Thus, all things are ordered (τὰ πάντα διακοσμεῖται) in like manner at the quick nod of God's Logos, each one being produced in its own way (τὰ οἰκεία παρ' ἐκάστου), and one order (μία τάξις), correspondingly, being accomplished (ἀποτελεῖται) out of all things.²¹⁹

Echoing Ignatius' images of the church chorus and the cosmic singers, and also Philo and Clement of Rome's choral universe, the passage figures the cosmic order musically. Thus, under the direction of its choirmaster, the Logos, the cosmos works as harmoniously as a liturgical choir.

219 *Gentiles* 43.1–7, 27–32.

Before further analysis, a note is in order on the image of the Logos as choir-master. The word *καθηγεμών* signifies, not only “choirmaster,” but other things, such as statesman and the head of a philosophical school. It is a telling concatenation of meanings, emphasising the universal authority of the Logos. In similar circumstances, Clement preferred the term *χορηγός*,²²⁰ which means both choir leader and a financial provider for the chorus. Combined in the tradition which they illustrate, these Alexandrian discourses depict a Logos who has authority over and provides for the choir of the cosmos. On this note, I turn to what Athanasius’ passage has to say about the universe.

When we look closer at the first part of the excerpt, one aspect of the Athanasian description stands out: while the singers form one chorus and produce one melody, they preserve their difference. A child sings as a child, a young person as a young one etc.²²¹ Maximus borrowed this image when he depicted the liturgy as unifying the various members of the church as one body under Christ, its head.²²² While Maximus’ image of the church chorus is explicit, Athanasius’ image is only implicitly so. However, interpreted through the lens of Maximus’ approach and their traditional predecessors, the Athanasian version signifies the liturgical assembly too. As we have seen above, it iterates familiar tropes such as Ignatius’ church choir and Clement’s prophetic chorus. What matters more is that the singers of Athanasius’ and Maximus’ attuned choirs never lose their specificity. The singers intone one song, but with distinctive voices. Considered through the cosmological lens of the last half of the passage, Athanasius describes a universe where the different members “accomplish one order” (*μία τάξις ἀποτελεῖται*) each “in its own way” (*τὰ οἰκεῖα παρ’ ἐκάστου*). The chorus analogy enables Athanasius to affirm the complexity of creation, with its diverse unity and its unified diversity. It enables him to ponder the universe in terms of music. This is the closest that Athanasius’ treatise draws to articulating a melodious universe. The indirection remarked in regard to the lyre analogy remains the norm even here.

While the analogy of the choir is not sustained conclusively, the final lines of the passage—which figure a common denominator of the three analogies in *Gentiles* 43—aptly fulfils this choral image. That it does without mentioning the chorus, the choirmaster, and the singers. Only by way of this conclusion does

220 *Exhortation* 9.88.3.

221 As we read, “each one of them sings according to his nature and capability” (*ἕκαστος μὲν κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ δύναμιν φωνεῖ*; *Gentiles* 43.4–5). For a brief note on this, see Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 37.

222 *The Mystagogy* 1.163–184, 199–203.

the cosmic musicality become apparent. Nevertheless, Athanasius believed that his analogies suffice to bring out the theological meaningfulness of the universe.²²³ It does not matter how compelling his analogies are. Relevant is that his conviction, voiced at the end of the treatise, confirms the missional tenor of *Gentiles*—to present the cosmos as a witness to God and as a means of divine revelation.

Athanasius made use of approaches and images met with in earlier sources: the Logos as musician and choirmaster, and the cosmos of harmony and meaningfulness, typified by the song of the lyre and the chorus. His main source must have been his Alexandrian forebear, Clement. But in using musical analogies Athanasius was not as bold as Clement was. He neither called providence a divine song nor described the ordered universe as melodious, at least not directly. His rich musical vocabulary, however, complements the limited range of his analogies. It should be also noted that for the purposes of the Christian worldview he was equally interested in textual or syntactic images. In this he may also be indebted to Irenaeus. Be that as it may, he consistently referred to a syntactic, semantic, or narrative universe.²²⁴ In so doing he became an important contributor to the tradition of representing the cosmos as “another scripture.” As La Matina would have it, Athanasius’ aim was to “lexicalise” the world²²⁵—an operation which concurs with Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson’s idea of making the “syntactic space.”²²⁶ And so, what Clement achieved by representing reality primarily through melodic metaphors, Athanasius matched with an ensemble of musical, lexical, and syntactic registers. But his narrative approach did not significantly depart from Clement’s protocols. After all, in antiquity the public delivery of all narratives—poetic or otherwise—presupposed, if not music, at least some form of dramatic intonation.²²⁷ Athanasius himself pointed this out in interpreting the Psalms.²²⁸

Before concluding, it is noteworthy that as Athanasius drew on earlier contributions, his approach influenced in turn other authors. Nothing vanishes without a trace. There is every probability that his choral universe inspired Max-

223 *Gentiles* 47.20–26.

224 *Gentiles* 38.1–7. Cf. *Life* 78.1.

225 La Matina, *L'accadere del suono*, 157.

226 Hillier and Hanson, *The social logic of space*, 48–49.

227 I am grateful to Ian Fraser for alerting me to this matter.

228 His *Letter to Marcellinus* (PG 27, 12–45) is replete with references to the Book of Psalms as “singing” the content of scriptural wisdom. See also Kevin Douglas Hill, *Athanasius and the Holy Spirit: The Development of His Early Pneumatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 91.

imus' views on the church and the cosmos.²²⁹ Closer to his time, his younger admirer, Basil, echoed his approach when he referred to "the general choir of the creation."²³⁰

5 Conclusions

The authors whose contributions were studied above endeavoured to represent reality in ways that resonated with their readers. To that end, they borrowed musical images and terms from the church's liturgical milieu, which overlapped with the broader cultural framework of late antiquity. This effort was a legitimate way of considering things—through familiar references—the way that most cultures employ anthropomorphic images to depict reality in comprehensible terms. Corresponding to the overall human propensity to read ourselves into everything around us, the early Christians looked at reality in ways relevant to their own milieu. Thus, they compared cosmic phenomena with the church assembly and its liturgical rhythms, especially its rich musical expressions. But in depicting the cosmos as melodious they also observed polemical, missional, and pedagogical strategies. These strategies converged in the elaboration of a Christian worldview comparable with competing representations of reality by drawing on the available information, albeit in critical fashion.

This was primarily the achievement of the two Alexandrian fathers studied here, Clement and Athanasius. Both aimed to assert the logic, soundness, and elegance of the Christian worldview for believers who were still hesitant. To that end, they creatively redrafted current cosmological ideas into a coherently musical narrative that matched the competing cultural models. Beyond that, they pushed Christian cosmology towards the centre of theological reflection, thus paving the way for the great cosmological synthesis of the Cappadocian fathers.

We also discovered that the contributions of the two Alexandrian theologians drew upon the liturgical and musical sensibility of several antecedents. They met with Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Irenaeus on the shared ground of ecclesiology and cosmology. With Philo they crossed paths due to his equation of the synagogal music and the music of the spheres. For all these authors, and, presumably, their readers, the praising assemblies and the cosmos displayed liturgical features. The singing creation and the liturgical community—

229 *The Mystagogy* 1.199–206.

230 τὴν κοινὴν τῆς κτίσεως χοροστασίαν (*Hexaemeron* 3.9.40–43).

images which they variously used—signified the harmonious activities of both the universe and the church, namely, natural movement and virtuous accomplishments, respectively.

These authors considered the cosmos an attuned structure comprising many layers and beings. Given the divine source of cosmic harmony—the Logos—natural phenomena are assessable not only under the species of “nature.” Cosmic harmony is a message, and so the universe and all things within it serve as means for the disclosure of divine wisdom, both textually as “another scripture,” and musically as liturgical praise. Culturally, scripturally, and liturgically conditioned, this melodic representation of reality shows a theologically eloquent cosmos, a genuine book of revelation. The universe communicates divine wisdom. Ted Chiang would call this representation a platform where the physical universe meets the lexical universe.²³¹ This is Hillier and Hanson’s syntactic universe. Interestingly, this musical and lexical worldview marked the Christian psyche throughout history. In modern times, two authors sublimely rehearsed it, J.R.R. Tolkien in “The Music of the Ainur”²³² and C.S. Lewis in “The Great Dance”²³³ and “The Founding of Narnia.”²³⁴

The musical appraisal of the universe represents a significant step forward, past the timid contours of the Disciple’s sketches, towards a maturely articulated Christian worldview. As we shall discover in Chapters Three and Four, what made it possible is the praxis of natural contemplation.

231 Ted Chiang, *Stories of Your Life and Others* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), 150.

232 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales*, Part One, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 52–55.

233 Lewis, *Perelandra*, 334–339.

234 C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, book 1: *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), 116–126, 133–138.

Contemplation of the Natural World: The Second and the Third Century

The musical representations of the cosmos discussed in Chapter Two presuppose a contemplative way of perceiving reality. One cannot read melodious patterns in nature without undergoing a reflective process, that is, without comparing the world of music and the order of things. Behind the articulation of the early Christian worldview in musical terms lies the reflective process known as natural contemplation or contemplation of nature (also as physics, physiology, and natural philosophy). Without returning to musical imagery, it is to the elements of this process that I turn in this and in the next chapter. My witnesses are four authors from the second to the fourth century.

Before anything, I must point out that to contemplate nature did not require strict observance of only one method. The evidence I examine in Chapters Three and Four does not document such a concern, or at least not as a primary interest. A framework must have existed though, but an explicit methodological outline is nowhere to be found in the analysed material. The relevant elements are mentioned only when the discourse demands it. Certain mainstays of the framework keep appearing throughout, however, such as the scriptural lens and ethical criteria, but the differences are equally transparent. For example, Clement and Evagrius explicitly discussed methodological aspects, while Origen and Athanasius preferred to move freely within the general framework. Apart from this—and keeping with then current trends¹—they all attempted to blend scientific information and the theological representation of reality. This task was integral to the contemplation of the natural world. Also noteworthy is that they shared the view that to engage in natural philosophy required a contemplative disposition in the personal subject. Such a criterion matched the classical *paideia*, the educational system which shaped lives, not careers,² and

1 Philosophical, religious, and spiritual interpretations of science already occurred in the classical era. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, The Gifford Lectures 1936 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 90. In Chapters One and Two we also noticed certain Christian efforts in this direction.

2 Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar,” 2–10. Peter Gemeinhardt, “In Search of Christian *Paideia*: Education and Conversion in Early Christian Biography,” *ZAC* 16:1 (2012): 88–98. Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 14–16,

which engendered the ancient sage.³ It also matched the typical profile of the ancient Greek “theorist,” or contemplative person.⁴ Borrowing Brown’s point, these Christian authors shared with their classical predecessors the conviction that “the capacity of the inner to permeate the outer” was paramount for *theoria*, contemplation.⁵ The quality of people’s inner life impacted their grasp of reality. Thus, it was not the technique—or the method of contemplation—that was central to natural philosophy, but the contemplative persons. This might explain why these authors did not subscribe to only one approach. Depending on their sensitivities, achievements, and skills, the contemplative persons have unique ways of considering reality.

Accordingly, herein I focus upon the contemplative person seen as a saint, the importance of which remains largely unnoticed in contemporary reconstructions of natural contemplation. It is true that scholars refer to both the holy sage and to the contemplative approaches of (some of) these authors, but the fusion between both areas is not yet evident. And while, recently, Blowers provided crucial insights into the efforts of Clement, Origen, and Evagrius to bridge holiness and natural contemplation,⁶ Athanasius did not elicit his interest from this viewpoint. Truth be told, Athanasius’ contributions to natural contemplation generally go unnoticed in the relevant literature. But what matters is that apart from Blowers and a few other partial exceptions—duly noted in what follows—contemporary scholars do not acknowledge the holy contemplative as inherent to the method. Such is the case of Köckert’s treatment of Origen in her magnificent *Christliche Kosmologie*.

I presume that, as Louth had discussed,⁷ the difficulty derives from the modern objectivist dogma, according to which researcher’s person is irrelevant when it comes to research. But this is not the case of ancient and late antique physics, not by a long shot. As Andrea Wilson Nightingale pointed out, ancient physics “was based on the kinship—rather than the distance—between subject and object.”⁸ The personal qualities of the subject are intrinsic to the con-

99–100. Werner Jaeger, “Paideia Christi,” *ZNW* 50:1–2 (1959): 1–14. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, three vols, trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford University Press, 1944), 1:xxii–iv.

3 Elisa Uusimäki, “The Rise of the Sage in Greek and Jewish Antiquity,” *JSJ* 49 (2018): 1–29.

4 Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9–11.

5 Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar,” 5.

6 Blowers, *Drama*, 316–318.

7 Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, xi–iii, 17–44.

8 Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, 10.

templative process, shaping the contemplative person's grasp of reality. Against this backdrop, I must point out that the objectivist bias is not without repercussions. Specifically, most scholars take Origen's and Evagrius' speculations at face value, namely, as literal references to an objective, metaphysical, and idealistic reality. This literalist approach mangles the message, generating commotion among sympathisers and opponents of both authors. But, when one considers these speculations from the vantage of the saintly contemplative, they take on a whole new meaning, which I shall discuss in due course.

In this and in the next chapter I develop the foundations laid by Blowers by looking closer at the contributions of all four authors. I also draw upon Torjesen's crucial discussion about the holy exegete.⁹ What makes this methodological conjunction possible is Blowers' point that these authors approached natural contemplation exegetically.¹⁰ While I already referred to his stance on the matter in Chapter Two, I shall return to it below.

The strong nexus between the contemplative person and natural contemplation in Clement and Origen—whose contributions I examine below—should not come as a surprise. In their language the human being, *anthropos*, means “the one who looks upwards.” People are made to know; they are contemplative beings who strive to understand reality. This nuance was not lost on either of them.¹¹ In turn, their paideutic training taught them that personal qualities and the virtues condition perception, including success in contemplation.¹² They would have therefore agreed with Lewis that “what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are.”¹³ Furthermore, as David Runia has shown, Clement and Origen were admirers of Philo.¹⁴ They emulated his interest in matters cosmological, where the available sciences played a significant role.¹⁵ They also adopted his integration of Platonism and Scripture, instrumental to early Christian physics.¹⁶ Last but not least, in the footsteps of Philo—who

9 Torjesen, “The Inspired Interpreter,” 288, 298.

10 Blowers, *Drama*, 315–335.

11 This is obvious, for example, in Clement's *Stromateis* 4.26.1.21–25. See Costache, “Being,” 58–59.

12 Jaeger, *Paideia*, 1:xxi–ii. This conviction was quite contrary to Aristotle's division of contemplation and praxis. Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, 209–218, 227–230.

13 Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 148.

14 Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 132–183.

15 Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 104.

16 David T. Runia, *Philo and the Church Fathers: A Collection of Papers*, VCSup 32 (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1995), 15, 124; *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 145–147, 163–171.

echoed Pythagorean convictions¹⁷—Clement set the tone in how to consider contemplation in connection with the holy man, or the Christian exemplar of this human type.¹⁸ Whether they acknowledged him or not, his Alexandrian heirs followed suit.

In short, their cultural context taught Clement and Origen that the desire to know reality is profoundly human; that in order to fulfil it one must attain holiness; and that to distill information requires working within an integrative framework, scientific, philosophical, and scriptural. It is from this complex background that they surmised their view that contemplation of the natural world is, moreover, the best way of making an impact upon both human life and the cosmos.

I must now turn to Clement's contributions.

1 Clement

We learned about Clement's pedagogical cast of mind in Chapter Two. His teaching strategies originated in the classical form of education, *paideia*, which prescribed gradual introduction into the art of thinking and living conducive to personal betterment.¹⁹ This is of great significance in what follows, as it accounts for his interest in personal transformation, higher knowledge, and holiness. Indeed, he discovered proofs of spiritual and intellectual advancement in the formidable personality of Pantaenus, his teacher.²⁰ He also

17 Gerald Bostock, "Origen and the Pythagoreanism of Alexandria," in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:465–478, esp. 478. Runia, *Philo and the Church Fathers*, 54–76.

18 See Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 8. What Clement says at the end of *Exhortation* about Christians as renewed people and in the portrait of the "holy gnostic" in *Stromateis* echoes Philo's depiction of the therapeutae's lifestyle. Of course, Clement's holy person is wholly focused on Christ and his Gospel.

19 Ronald E. Heine, "The Alexandrians," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 117–130, esp. 119. Jaeger, *Early Christianity*, 114. Judith L. Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria," *JECs* 9:1 (2001): 3–25. Laura Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria e la "φυσιολογία veramente gnostica": Saggio sulle origini e le implicazioni di un'epistemologia e di un'ontologia "cristiane"*, *RTAMS* 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 10–17. For a sample of Clement's adherence to the classical educational curriculum, which include theology, geometry, agriculture, philosophy, and wellbeing, see *Stromateis* 6.8.65.6. This section of Chapter Three is based on my paper, "A Triadic Pattern within a Triadic Pattern: Clement's Contemplation of Nature," delivered for the symposium Tradition and Innovation in Early Christianity, held at Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, 15–17 August 2018.

20 Pantaenus matches the profile of the ancient *theoros*. See Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles*

reflected upon his own pursuit of wisdom and holiness.²¹ In the same vein, he examined a series of scriptural paradigms, which I shall discuss in what follows. He arrived at the conclusion that the best outcome of the transformative process is the “holy gnostic”—the saintly sage—whose knowledge is encyclopaedic, whose discernment is sharp, and who teaches by way of heuristic devices.²² Clement’s major works, ordered as a curriculum and culminating in the mystical wisdom of *The Teacher*, illustrate the gnostic quest perfectly.²³

Clement believed that, to become a Christian gnostic, the seeker must personally undergo a threefold schedule comprising ethics, physics, and epoptics, advancing from virtuous formation to the contemplation of nature to the vision of the ultimate reality.²⁴ This schedule emulates ancient philosophical curricula, which it also transforms.²⁵ As the ancient curricula and the early Christian experience entailed comparable stages of initiation, Clement was able to connect them easily.²⁶ He called this threefold framework in a number of ways, e.g. “gnostic tradition,” “holy gnosis,” and “ecclesiastical gnosis.”²⁷ And even though the latter phrase refers to the church, this framework is not the same with

of Truth, 63–68. For notes on Pantaenus, see Costache, “The Teacher and His School,” 187, 190, 196 (and the references therein).

21 Bucur, “Hierarchy,” 2–45. Costache, “Being,” 56–64. Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy,” 5–6. André Méhat, *Étude sur les “Stromates” de Clément d’Alexandrie*, PaS 7 (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 46–47.

22 *Stromateis* 2.20.104.3; 7.1.2.1; 7.7.47.3.

23 The curricular arrangement of Clement’s writings has not escaped recent scholarship. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 11–24; “Hierarchy,” 4–7. Costache, “The Teacher and His School,” 192–194. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 51–54.

24 *The Pedagogue* 1.1.1.1–3.3. *Stromateis* 5.10.66.2–4. See Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 181–215. For the ethical prerequisites of the curriculum, see Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy,” 4–5, 14–15 and Méhat, *Étude*, 346–373, 509–512.

25 The curricula of Plato and other ancient philosophers have long been examined. Pierre Hadot, “Les divisions des parties de la philosophie dans l’Antiquité,” *MH* 36:4 (1979): 201–223, esp. 203, 206–207, 210–211, 212, 218–220, 222. Salvatore R. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*, OTM (Oxford University Press, 1971), 170–171. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 105. Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 150–181. Philo, Clement’s immediate source, presented Moses as undertaking the same Platonic curriculum. M. David Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Studia Philonica Annual* 26 (2014), 1–27, esp. 11. Uusimäki, “The Rise of the Sage,” 15–16. For other impacts of Philo’s ethics and mysticism on Clement, see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 148–149.

26 For further details, see Costache, “The Teacher and His School,” 189–197.

27 *Stromateis* 3.9.67.2; 5.10.63.1; 6.7.61.1; 7.16.103.6. For Clement’s “mystagogical” curriculum of paideutic inspiration, see April D. DeConick, “Traumatic Mysteries: Pathways of Mysticism among the Early Christians,” in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism: Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov, VCSup 160 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 11–51, esp. 23–26.

believers' induction into the faith. Beyond offering basic catechism and besides its ethical, spiritual, and contemplative components, it fosters deep learning, research skills, and dialectical thinking. It also entails exercising discernment in matters natural and cultural, treated as mysteries to be deciphered.²⁸ Clement's framework constitutes, then, an interdisciplinary platform for bridging the pursuit of holiness and a range of fields of study, including natural philosophy.²⁹ Accordingly, its noblest outcome—the "holy gnostic"—is someone who embodies the virtues of a Christian saint and the wisdom of a classical sage.³⁰ Through the evidence analysed in Chapter Two, we already know, albeit indirectly, about the gnostic's capacity to reuse cultural material within a Christian setting. But fundamental to Clement's curriculum remains the experience of holiness. In turn, the curriculum provided a rigorous structure and the language with which to articulate this experience.

In what follows I discuss the second curricular phase, natural contemplation, which as integral to "ecclesiastical gnosis" became with Clement an established "ecclesial discipline" long before the fourth century.³¹ Its aim is to grasp the cosmos as such and in the light of its divine source.³² What I propose, here, is that Clement developed the second curricular stage into another threefold pattern. This he accomplished by reworking the Platonic stance on ascending from the physical plane to the supreme beauty through living well—or ethically—and through gradual learning, from preparatory, partial, methods of knowing to unified knowledge.³³ Typically, in this and other matters Clement does not favour his readers with an easy answer.³⁴ In order to form an idea of this original development, one must go through a vast amount of information scattered throughout his writings.

28 Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy," 7–9.

29 Doru Costache, "Christian Gnosis: From Clement the Alexandrian to John Damascene," in *The Gnostic World*, ed. Garry W. Trompf et al., Routledge Worlds (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 259–270, esp. 260. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 40–42.

30 See Uusimäki, "The Rise of the Sage," 18.

31 The phrase "ecclesial discipline" belongs to Blowers, *Drama*, 322–328, who referred to the broader reception of this approach in the fourth century. Clement laid important foundations, which undoubtedly depended upon what Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, 74–83, called Plato's "civic *theoria*."

32 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 97–98. Rizzorio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 43–99. As these scholars already addressed relevant matters, below I mention only what I need in order to build my case.

33 Plato, *Symposium* 210d3–8; 211b7–211c9.

34 See Judith L. Kovacs, "Concealment and Gnostic Exegesis: Clement of Alexandria's Interpretation of the Tabernacle," *SP* 31 (1997): 414–437.

What transpires at the end of this exploration is that he worked out a contemplative approach which progressed from the scientific description of natural phenomena to their rendition through the lens of church's experience to their view from a divine vantage point. The first stage of this process, analytical, consists in assimilating solid scientific information about reality, to remedy confusion and ignorance. The second stage, hermeneutical or interpretative, grasps the cosmos within a faith setting that is scripturally and liturgically based. Chapter Two has provided us with relevant examples of how the second step works. The third phase, transcending both analysis and interpretation, is solely the province of the "holy gnostic." It is a matter of perceiving the cosmos through the transformed eyes of someone who is in touch with the divine.

Andrew Itter intuited to this threefold structure within the broader tripartite curriculum, to which he referred as physics, cosmogony, and theology. For some reason, he treated separately the issue of cosmic origins, or cosmogony, as not pertaining to physics.³⁵ Here, he may have wished to convey that cosmogony is a scriptural iteration of the available sciences. But my proposal differs from his. What I gathered from Clement is not a concern with the taxonomy of the relevant topics; it is a methodological pursuit, as I outlined just above. Also, the material I discussed in Chapter Two leaves little room for identifying the second stage of physics only with the topic of cosmic origins. More important is that, in developing the second stage of the broad curriculum, physics, Clement proposes a way of contemplating the cosmos which begins from the realistic appraisal of nature. In so doing, he does not treat the universe merely as a steppingstone on his way towards a "realm apart from the visible world," as Lovecraft would say.³⁶ We shall soon discover the importance of matter and the physical world for understanding his views, which are free of spiritualist connotations.

After I consider the place allocated for physics within "gnostic tradition," I discuss the profile of the "holy gnostic," and then outline Clement's developed system of natural contemplation.

1.1 *"Gnostic Tradition" and the Contemplation of Nature*

The various ancient curricula—Platonic and otherwise—taught Clement that each stage corresponds to a certain level of awareness and perception. The higher that people, men and women, go through the schedule, the broader and

35 Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 141–173. For a sketch of Clementine natural contemplation, but not organised according to the three stages, see Méhat, *Étude*, 513–516.

36 Lovecraft, "The Tomb," 14.

deeper their grasp of reality.³⁷ The same holds true for Christian initiation. One is the catechumen's understanding, another is that of a person enlightened through baptism, and still another of someone advanced in faith and life.³⁸ By undertaking the curriculum, Clement's "holy gnostic" becomes an accomplished sage and a saintly person, capable of the sharpest of perceptions. To the relation between personal becoming and cognitive progress I must now turn.

In the framework of "gnostic tradition," progress unfolds from an undeveloped faith and preconceived ideas to certified knowledge and wisdom.³⁹ As Eric Osborn points out, this process presupposes scriptural insights and dialectical exercises.⁴⁰ Advancement from faith to knowledge requires dialectics and a contemplation that strengthens the faith, giving it depth and breadth.⁴¹ It also requires familiarisation with the available sciences, with philosophy, and theology.⁴² Clement's own youthful quest perfectly exemplifies this approach.⁴³ However, above all, advancement entails a sustained training for life—or virtuous praxis⁴⁴—which hones one's perception. Demonstration and analysis remain indispensable for mapping the cosmos, but only someone who is both purified and gracefully assisted could lay hold of the transcendent realities.⁴⁵

37 Clement pointed out that the gnostic quest, like martyrdom, was at hand for men and women. See *Stromateis* 4.1.1.1; 4.8.58.2–59.4; 4.8.62.4–63.1; 4.8.67.4; 4.19.118.1. His approach, here, develops the views he outlined in *The Pedagogue* 1.4.10.1–11.2.

38 *The Pedagogue* 1.11.3–4; 3.12.97.3. Bucur, "Hierarchy," 9–16, 19–24, 27–42. Costache, "Being," 60–62; "Christian Gnosis," 259.

39 *Stromateis* 2.4.13.3; 2.4.17.1; 2.6.30.1; 2.11.48.1; 6.7.61.1–2; 6.15.109.2; 6.18.165.1; 7.10.55.2–3.

40 Eric Osborn, "Clement and Platonism," in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:419–427, esp. 424–426.

41 *Stromateis* 1.11.51.4. For Clement's complex view of faith, see Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 118–142. Second-century apologists such as Justin and Clement appreciated the aid of philosophical disciplines. See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "The Greek Church Fathers and Philosophy," in *Theology and Philosophy: Faith and Reason*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 17–30, esp. 20–21. The same goes for later representatives of the patristic tradition. See Bruce V. Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions on the Borders of Philosophy: Contesting the Boundaries of Nature, Art, and Religion*, PSCC 26 (Cham: Springer, 2019), 32–34.

42 *Stromateis* 1.28.176.3–177.1; 2.4.13.3; 6.7.57.2; 6.10.80.1.

43 Clement's appreciation for broad study did not escape contemporary scholars. Dragoș Andrei Giulea, "Apprehending 'Demonstrations' from the First Principle: Clement of Alexandria's Phenomenology of Faith," *JR* 89:2 (2009): 187–213, esp. 194–198. Peter Harrison, "Science, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism," *Isis* 107:3 (2016): 587–591, esp. 588. Matyáš Havrda, "Galenus Christianus? The Doctrine of Demonstration in *Stromata* VIII and the Question of its Source," *VC* 65 (2011): 343–375, esp. 344–354. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 199–201, 203–206.

44 Whence his phrase, μελετᾶτε ἑῆν ("exercise living"; *Stromateis* 5.14.106.1). Cf. *Stromateis* 5.2.14.1.

45 *Stromateis* 5.3.17.3; 5.12.82.3–4; 5.13.83.1; 6.18.166.3. Blowers, *Drama*, 15, 37. See also Alexan-

No wonder whoever completes this course is the “polymath gnostic,” the “holy gnostic,” a holy sage,⁴⁶ that is, a genuine exemplar of the third kind of people, divine (in Clement’s own words as well as Plotinus’).⁴⁷ Thus, “gnostic tradition” amounts to a holistic process of existential transformation and intellectual advancement, leading to spiritual perfection and a comprehensive grasp of reality.⁴⁸

Taking a closer look at this process, it begins with *catharsis*, one’s purification and change of life, then progresses from the “little mysteries of the teaching” (τὰ μικρὰ μυστήρια διδασκαλίας) to the “great mysteries of the universe” (τὰ μεγάλα περὶ τῶν συμπάντων) and then to divine vision.⁴⁹ This terminology evokes the Platonic trajectory mentioned earlier. That said, Clement’s programme does not follow a oneway sequence, from the earlier stages to the final ones. Advancement is collateral and inclusive. For example, purification remains an ongoing task, not being confined to the beginning of the process; there is no end to it. Accordingly, the “holy gnostic” is committed to cathartic exercises throughout life⁵⁰ and does not abandon the scientific knowledge reached before becoming contemplatively proficient. Indeed, Clement assures us that Abraham the gnostic pursued astronomical interests even after he reached divine knowledge.⁵¹ The same goes for faith. While it guides one’s early steps, it does not become redundant later on; in its mature form, it operates as a theological instrument and way of thinking.⁵² Thus, personal virtue, learn-

der Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition*, AV 59 (Thessaloniki: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikōn Meletōn, 1994), 266–268. For a very recent iteration of these principles, see Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions*, 36–37.

46 *Stromateis* 1.13.58.2; 1.23.153.2–5; 2.5.20.2; 5.1.8.5–6; 6.12.103.1–104.1; 6.8.65.1,6; 6.10.82.1.

47 Clement speaks of three kinds of people: beasts, human beings, and gods, of which the “gods” are utterly transformed by the divine encounter (*Stromateis* 7.6.95.1–2). In turn, Plotinus’s “third kind” (τρίτον γένος) of people are “divine human beings” (θείοι ἄνθρωποι) who possess a clear vision of the “higher radiance” (ἄνω αἴγλην) (Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.9.1.16–21).

48 δικαιοσύνην μετὰ εὐσεβοῦς ἐπιστήμης (“righteousness together with a reverent science”; *Stromateis* 1.7.37.6). See Costache, “Christian Gnosis,” 260–261. For the gnostic’s divine sight, see DeConick, “Traumatic Mysteries,” 25.

49 *Stromateis* 5.11.71.1–4. Cf. *Stromateis* 1.24.159.3; 4.1.3.1; 5.11.70.7–71.4; 7.12.78.4. See Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 163–169 and Laura Rizzerio, “L’access à la transcendance divine selon Clément d’Alexandrie: dialectique platonicienne ou expérience de l’union chrétienne?” *REA* 44 (1998): 159–179, esp. 160–164. The gnostic progression corresponds to what Wilson Nightingale (*Spectacles of Truth*, 83–92) calls Plato’s “private *theoria*.”

50 *Stromateis* 4.25.161.1; 6.7.60.1–3. See Méhat, *Étude*, 373–388.

51 *Stromateis* 6.10.80.3.

52 πιστή τοῖνον ἢ γνώσις, γνώστη δὲ ἢ πίστις θεία τινὶ ἀκολουθίᾳ τε καὶ ἀντακολουθίᾳ γίνεται

ing, and the skills acquired during the preparatory stages continue to condition one's becoming throughout life, but evolve in proportion to the gnostic's own advancement.

The complexity of the process becomes even more obvious in that epoptics—or the highest vision—goes off the charts, transcending both learning and purification. Learning and purification prepare the “holy gnostic” for epoptics and, as we just discovered, continue to work throughout the process. But the epoptic stage neither draws on them nor is it their cumulative outcome. As Guy Stroumsa has showed, in its highest form Clement’s “Christian philosophy” declares independence from all learning.⁵³ The highest vision is not reducible to study, analysis, and thinking. It is a “state of eternal and unchanging contemplation” (ἔξιν θεωρίας ἀίδιον καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον),⁵⁴ an encompassing, gracious, and divine mode of knowing.⁵⁵ It is “divine wisdom,” “pure light which enlightens those who are pure,” facilitating the “comprehension of the truth.”⁵⁶ As it is not the outcome of previous phases, this kind of insight might occur any time during the process, not only at its end. Mirroring the experience of Philo’s deified Moses,⁵⁷ Clementine epoptics traverses the threefold curriculum, including its second stage. Further notes about it are in order.

In terms of natural philosophy, epoptics amounts to “contemplating and comprehending” (ἐποπτεύειν καὶ περινοεῖν) the “great mysteries of the universe” through the “primary meaning” (πρώτην νόησιν) of nature’s unity and plurality.⁵⁸ As discussed in Chapter Two, the “primary meaning”—or the “measure

(“gnosis becomes faithful and faith becomes gnostic by way of a divine order and reciprocity of sorts”; *Stromateis* 2.4.16.2). οὐτε ἡ γνώσις ἄνευ πίστεως οὐθ’ ἡ πίστις ἄνευ γνώσεως (“neither knowledge without faith nor faith without knowledge”; *Stromateis* 5.1.1.3). See Giulea, “Apprehending,” 202–203, 210–212. Here, Clement borrows Aristotle’s identification between contemplation and theology. See Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, 236.

53 Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016), 61.

54 *Stromateis* 6.7.61.3.

55 ἡ δόσις τῆς θεοδωρήτου γνώσεως (“the gift of God-given knowledge”; *Stromateis* 8.1.2.1). See Matyáš Havrda, *The So-Called Eighth Stromateus by Clement of Alexandria: Early Christian Reception of Greek Scientific Methodology*, pA 144 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 135–137.

56 *Selections (Eclogae propheticæ)* 32.3. For an analysis of this state, labelled “noetic knowledge,” see Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions*, 37–38.

57 Litwa, “The Deification of Moses,” 9–22. Runia, “God and Man,” 53–63. Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, “Moses’ Riddles: Esoteric Trends in Patristic Hermeneutics,” in *Interpretation in Religion*, ed. Shlomo Biedermann and Ben-Ami Scharfstein (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 229–248.

58 *Stromateis* 5.11.71.1–6.

and number of all things”⁵⁹—is not an impersonal law. It is the personal source of “holy gnosis” and its supreme object, Christ, the Son of God who “grants and reveals” (παραδοθεῖσα καὶ ἀποκαλυφθεῖσα) the “science and understanding” (ἐπιστήμη καὶ κατὰληψις) “of things that are and will be” (τῶν ὄντων τε καὶ ἐσομένων).⁶⁰ Here, nature’s numbers, measures, or patterns—refractions of the “primary meaning” within the creation—perform a double function, securing cosmic order and pointing to its source. In so doing, they facilitate a complex grasp of the cosmos as such and together with its divine source. That this is so becomes transparent in epoptic perspective. The “holy gnostic” is able to grasp the universe together with its creator, or, to paraphrase Luc Brisson, the mathematical structure of reality together with its source, the divine mathematician.⁶¹ More poetically, as Young would have it, Clement’s gnostic lies down on a dock by the lake alongside the incarnate creator, looking up “into a moonless night at the wonder of the emerging stars.”⁶² In short and in this context, epoptics amounts to perceiving reality from a theological, Christ-centred vantage point. This perception does not include, however, as Alexander Golitzin aptly observed, a complete grasp of the divine source, which Clement duly acknowledges as transcendent to all things created.⁶³

A theological perception of created reality is also possible before the epoptic experience. Faith itself seeks to understand the physical universe. In Clement’s words, “travelling through the beings accessible to the senses (διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ὁδεύσασα), faith leaves behind (any) assumptions (about reality) and presses forward towards an authenticated (knowledge of things), to reside in the truth (εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν καταμένει).”⁶⁴ So understood, faith is a way of seeking understanding. It is an epistemic factor, not an assumption (ὑπόληψις), which subjects all things to scrutiny. As an intellectual tool—elsewhere called “scientific contemplation” (θεωρία ἐπιστημονική)⁶⁵—it operates in dialectic manner.⁶⁶ It

59 *Exhortation* 6.69.2.

60 *Stromateis* 6.7.61.1. For Christ’s epistemological centrality, see Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 107–111 and Osborn, “Clement and Platonism,” 420–422.

61 Luc Brisson, “Plato’s Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics,” in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin, BCP (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 212–231, esp. 217. See also Costache, “Meaningful Cosmos,” 108–110, 116, 119, 129, for Clement’s linking the numbers of nature and the Logos, their source. In the same vein, Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 150–155 and Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 75–76.

62 Young, *The Shack*, 109.

63 Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 261–262.

64 *Stromateis* 2.4.13.3. See also the phrase τῆς τῶν ὅλων ἀρχῆς ἐπιστήμη πίστις (“faith is the science of the principle of all things”; *Stromateis* 2.5.24.2).

65 *Stromateis* 7.16.102.2; 8.1.1.3.

66 *Stromateis* 1.5.32.4; 3.18.110.3; 6.1.1.1; 8.1.1.1. See Giulea, “Apprehending,” 198–202 and Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 132–136.

is an instrument by which the mind investigates reality in search for a secure (ἄψευδής) understanding of the universe. Clementine faith anticipates the scientific reason of modern times.

Against this backdrop, the “gnostic tradition,” faith, and the contemplation of nature are inseparable. After all, “holy gnosis” is the “science and understanding of the beings that are, will be, and have been,” together with the manner in which “they are, will be, and have been.”⁶⁷ By accessing the wisdom of the tradition, the gnostic person “knows and comprehends everything” (πάντων ἐπιστήμονα εἶναι καὶ πάντων περιληπτικόν),⁶⁸ the numbers, the measures, the patterns of nature. Their perception is intense and ample, exceeding the common norm. This happens because Christ, the creative Logos who possesses all understanding⁶⁹ and whose teaching is foundational for “holy gnosis,” reveals to the gnostic what “the (created) beings presently are, what the future things will be, and how the things that have been brought into being have come to be.”⁷⁰ In short, “gnostic tradition” facilitates the gnostic perception of the cosmos in its dynamic development from the past, through the present, into the future.

I must now turn to Clement’s methodological presuppositions of natural contemplation.

1.2 *Methodological Prolegomena*

In his seminal work on Clement’s philosophical background, Salvatore Lilla proposed that, overall, contemplation is about seeking the invisible beyond the visible side of reality.⁷¹ If that is the case, then, the Clementine gnostic would match “the Greek theorist” who, as Wilson Nightingale states, “distanced himself from the world in order to achieve a proximity to metaphysical objects.”⁷² As we shall soon discover, this view is not entirely accurate. I already suggested that by making recourse to the natural sciences—especially Aristotelian physical categories—Clement displayed a profound appreciation for the world. The gnostic therefore iterates Plato’s own interest in the cosmos,⁷³ but examines it

⁶⁷ *Stromateis* 6.7.61.1–2.

⁶⁸ *Stromateis* 6.8.68.2.

⁶⁹ *Stromateis* 6.8.70.2.

⁷⁰ περὶ τε τῶν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, περὶ τε τῶν μελλόντων ὡς ἔσται, περὶ τε τῶν γεγονότων ὡς ἐγένετο (*Stromateis* 6.9.78.5–6). Monfrinotti, *Creatore e creazione*, 106, found a similar stance in *Exhortation* 6.5.

⁷¹ Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 169.

⁷² Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, 10.

⁷³ For Plato’s cosmological interests, see Brisson, “Plato’s Natural Philosophy,” 212, 217–219 and Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth*, 23–24.

through the naturalistic lens of Aristotle's physics. In short, the "holy gnostic" engages the world in order to understand it and the beings within it, "whether the one or the many, to end by (apprehending) the universe."⁷⁴ Blowers, Laura Rizzerio, and Matteo Monfrinotti confirmed that Clement found value in contemplating nature in itself, not only in transit towards the invisible.⁷⁵ I agree with this assessment. After all, according to him the true initiates into the mysteries of existence survey both God and the heavens.⁷⁶ The prerequisites of Clement's contemplative method—to which I turn in what follows—give us a fair idea as to why his approach is irreducible to seeking the invisible, the outback of reality.

According to Clement, the "philosophers among us," the gnostics, pursue "the wisdom of the maker and teacher of all, sc. the Son of God's knowledge."⁷⁷ This is not a quest for what lies beyond the stars, an eon hence. Christ's wisdom, or knowledge, unlocks reality as a whole, including the numbers and the patterns of nature. It follows that to prioritise Christ's knowledge is to learn about the universe from its own maker, not a matter of preferring things transcendent. As Plato's eternal forms shed light upon the physical universe for whoever grasps them,⁷⁸ to prioritise Christ's knowledge amounts to contemplating the cosmos from a theological vantage point. This, in turn, facilitates a deep comprehension of reality. The logic of Clement's approach is neat. Christ knows everything "from before the foundation of the cosmos;"⁷⁹ by acquiring Christ's knowledge, the gnostic knows the universe as Christ does.

So understood, Clement's approach entails to consider reality through a double lens. There is the search for transcendent realities through the visible ones—from below or bottom-up—where the analysis of the natural world leads gradually to theological contemplation. And there is the gaze upon the physical objects from the altitude of divine revelation—from above or top-down—where theology interprets the meaning of the cosmos described by the natural sciences. As we saw just above, and simply put, Clement's method is complex, not one-way. It seeks to know Christ by contemplating the universe,

⁷⁴ *Stromateis* 6.8.69.3.

⁷⁵ Blowers, *Drama*, 318. Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 89, 98. Monfrinotti, *Creatore e creazione*, 185–202. Perhaps to a lesser extent, Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 150–155, maintained a similar position.

⁷⁶ *Exhortation* 12.119.3 (ὄψει τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, "you shall see the heavens"); 12.120.4 (τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὸν θεὸν ἐποπτεύσαι, "having a vision of the heavens and of God").

⁷⁷ *Stromateis* 6.7.55.2. Cf. *Stromateis* 6.7.58.1–2.

⁷⁸ Brisson, "Plato's Natural Philosophy," 213–214.

⁷⁹ *Stromateis* 6.7.58.1–2.

and also to understand the universe in the light of Christ's knowledge. Grasping the invisible—here, Christ's wisdom—through and beyond the visible is not the goal. To grasp the invisible is to look at the cosmos differently. Clement's method anticipates what Maximus later called "symbolic contemplation" or "mystagogy," which likewise considers the visible through the invisible and the invisible through the visible.⁸⁰

All this is not of secondary importance for whoever pursues holiness. As untested data are unreliable, striving to know is crucial; in turn, knowledge must be both tested and encyclopaedic. Clement shared in the scepticism of the ancients regarding preconceived ideas and the information derived from the senses.⁸¹ Ignorance does not allow for the right use of things, whereas to use them correctly is the hallmark of holiness. Perfection demands that one knows the cosmos and as many things within it as possible because this is how one can make right use of them.⁸² It is the same with divine knowledge. To know about God from books or hearsay, and to know God truly, are two different matters. The saints know God truly. Accordingly, as representatives of the third kind of people the seekers of holiness strive to know God directly and personally; they "hear the word of truth in a genuine and pure form."⁸³ Here, the opinions of people lacking intellectual and moral attainments do not matter. Such opinions are a matter of "drowning the soul's vision in the hazy ignorance pertaining to a worthless way of life."⁸⁴

To escape ignorance is therefore paramount. And to escape ignorance one must pursue the gnostic curriculum, which bolsters intellectual and moral progress, facilitating the acquisition of true knowledge and holiness. We already know that training and personal transformation enable one to discern the nature of things and to understand the universe.⁸⁵

80 *The Mystagogy* 2.46–51.

81 For a distinction between commonly acquired (κοινῶς) or untested knowledge and laboriously acquired (ἐξαιρέτως) or genuine knowledge, see *Stromateis* 1.1.3.1–2. The ancients knew long before Clement about the dangers of untested knowledge. Patricia Curd, "Parmenides and After: Unity and Plurality," in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, 34–55. W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), 2:1–80.

82 *Stromateis* 2.19.97.1; 3.6.52.1; 3.10.69.3; 4.13.94.3–4; 4.22.139.1; 6.14.112.1.

83 *Stromateis* 5.1.13.2.

84 *Stromateis* 1.28.178.1. For Clement's dislike for ignorance, see Méhat, *Étude*, 294–326. See also Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy," 7, for Clement's treatment of lazy students who did not dare to know.

85 *Stromateis* 5.12.78.2–3. See Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 131. This stance echoes Philo's Moses, who, being unified within himself, perceived the oneness of things. See Litwa, "The Deification of Moses," 16.

Clement identified the above elements in Moses' life, whose personal trajectory illustrates the gnostic experience. The prophet acquired an encyclopaedic education—embracing Chaldean, Egyptian, and Greek learning—which prepared him for the superior grasp of reality.⁸⁶ In like manner, the gnostics undergo the complete disciplinary curriculum, studying music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and philosophy. These disciplines equip them with skills for exploring the cosmos and the higher things.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, as in the prophet's case, natural contemplation requires more than the scientific or disciplinary research from below. The usefulness of the curricular sciences notwithstanding, the goal of the gnostics is to consider the world and natural phenomena from the creator's vantage point, that is, from above.⁸⁸ To comprehend reality requires, together with scientific expertise and dialectical prowess, theology in its highest form.

There is no contradiction, here, between faith and reason or theology and the sciences. As they coexist in Moses' experience, they work analogously and in cooperation, as faith and dialectic do.⁸⁹ For example, astronomy is not opposed to theology. Together with studying "the form of the universe, the bearing of the sky, and the movement of the stars (περί τε σχήματος τοῦ παντός καὶ φορᾶς οὐρανοῦ τῆς τε τῶν ἄστρων κινήσεως)," astronomy "brings the soul in the vicinity of the creative power (πλησιαίτερον τῇ κτιζούσῃ δυνάμει προσάγουσα τὴν ψυχὴν)."⁹⁰ Investigation of the physical world includes an interest in its meta-physical cause. Clement is not original here. As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, to integrate scientific information and philosophical interpretation was already the norm of the age. Osborn noted, similarly, that Clement inherited an understanding of φυσιολογία that did not mean knowledge of the natural world solely; physics took natural phenomena as "signs of transcendent reality."⁹¹

Against this backdrop, the study of nature advances from assessing the cosmic order to the consideration of its intelligible principles, and from the latter to the contemplation of their divine source, the creator. The following passage, an interpretation of Abraham's three-day journey to the mountains at Gen 22:3–4, partially exemplifies this process:

86 *Stromateis* 1.23.153.2–5.

87 *Stromateis* 1.5.32.4; 6.10.80.1–5. See Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 169–172. Rizziero, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 271–288, described how the gnostic advances from discipline to discipline towards higher knowledge. See also Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 106.

88 *Stromateis* 6.9.78.5–6.

89 Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 132–136.

90 *Stromateis* 6.11.90.3.

91 Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 212. Cf. Méhat, *Étude*, 149.

The first day (represents) the sight of beautiful things (in nature); the second (signifies) the soul's desire for what is best (τῶν ἀρίστων ἐπιθυμία);⁹² the third (corresponds to) the mind which discerns spiritual things (τὰ πνευματικά), for the Teacher who rose on the third day opens the eyes of (our) understanding ... It was only right for him to see the place from a distance, since God's location (ἡ χώρα τοῦ θεοῦ) is inaccessible—that place of which Plato learnt from Moses that it encompasses all things and the universe, and which he called the space of the forms (χώραν ἰδεῶν).⁹³

Thus interpreted, allegorically, Abraham's journey epitomises the gnostic experience. The patriarch progresses from contemplating the natural order of "beautiful things"⁹⁴ to the vision of "spiritual things"⁹⁵ through the midpoint of "desiring what is best,"⁹⁶ or the ethical stage. But the "spiritual things" are not the creator. The passage does not refer to seeing God, the apex of epoptic experience; instead, it outlines the curricular study of the cosmos. This refers to physics, ethics, and the finer discernment of reality, theological in nature; noteworthy, here, is the reversal of the first two stages, demanded by the patriarch's personal trajectory. Specifically, Abraham progresses from scientifically exploring the beauty—the order—of the visible world to a noetic perception of the spiritual, invisible realities, in the light of Christ's resurrection. The reference to Christ might seem anachronistic, but, as we learnt from Chapter Two, Clement identifies Christ with the eternal Logos who operates throughout history. Either way, here, Christ's resurrection is not the goal of contemplation; it is presupposed, it is an element of the method, the theological lens through which the "holy gnostic" perceives reality. It is a transfigured lens, allowing for the simultaneous grasp of the seen and the unseen sides of the universe. Accordingly, the "spiritual things" or the invisible realities are "God's place,"⁹⁷ but not God, serving as an interface between the creator and the visible creation. Rendered

92 I prefer Stählin's version τῶν ἀρίστων ἐπιθυμία ("desire for what is best") to Le Boulluec's rendition ἀρίστης ἐπιθυμία ("desire for improvement"). I am grateful to David Runia for the discussion that led to this decision. What matters is that the ethical sense of the phrase does not change.

93 *Stromateis* 5.11.73.2–3. See also the comments of Alain Le Boulluec in SC 279, 251–253.

94 τῶν καλῶν (*Stromateis* 5.11.73.2.3).

95 τὰ πνευματικά (*Stromateis* 5.11.73.2.5).

96 ἀρίστων ἐπιθυμία (*Stromateis* 5.11.73.2.4).

97 ἡ χώρα τοῦ θεοῦ (*Stromateis* 5.11.73.3.9–10). Cf. Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 265. Elsewhere, Clement refers to the "powers" of God by which God can be known, though God's essence transcends any human grasp. See Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 262–263.

in Platonic language as “the space of the forms,”⁹⁸ the invisible realities are the foundational principles of the physical universe. They coincide with the marks of the Logos—the divine numbers, measures, and patterns of nature, earlier mentioned.

Even without addressing divine vision, the above passage is directly relevant to my purposes. By considering both the visible and the invisible sides of created reality, the sage, Abraham, takes stock of nature from various angles. While the “first day” refers to physics in a narrow sense, the “second day” of ethics paves the way for a higher grasp of reality—pertaining to the “third day”—metaphysical and christological in nature. The “first day” stands for the disciplinary study of nature, from below; the “third day” is the last stage of physiology, the divine insight into the creation, the view from above. This approach is not singular. The same goes for another passage where Abraham considers reality from a combined, astronomical and theological, lens.⁹⁹ It is in the light of both passages that one should discern Clement’s lament about the limitations of the naturalistic approach, deprived of theological insight.¹⁰⁰ Rather than denying scientific research, he advocated a broader take on reality.

Turning to the other end of the spectrum, the theological viewpoint is not a matter of adhering to set assertions. It integrates various factors, from the highest divine vision to doctrinal discourse, from faith to scriptural to liturgical insights. When they combine, these factors produce a worldview from above, revelational. Through this lens, divinely perceived through the eyes of godlike beings—the gnostics—the universe is richer than its constituents; there is a meaningful side to all things. We know from Chapter Two about this perception. Clement alludes to it when he states that God’s presence on Mount Sinai made manifest the workings of providence within the universe: “that descent upon the mountain is the revelation of the divine power (at work) throughout the whole of the cosmos.”¹⁰¹ But this is not the only relevant reference. Elsewhere we read that by contemplating God and God’s Logos, the Son—“the first cause and the cause engendered by it”¹⁰²—the gnostics “firmly grasp the stable, unchangeable, and immovable principles (ἀμεταπτώτους καὶ ἀκινήτους λόγους)” of beings.¹⁰³ Once they reach God, the coherent infrastructure of all

98 χῶραν ἰδεῶν (*Stromateis* 5.11.73.3.10).

99 *Stromateis* 5.1.8.5–6.

100 *Stromateis* 5.14.134.1–3; 6.7.61.2.

101 ἐκεῖνη γὰρ ἡ ... κατὰβασις ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος θεοῦ ἐπίφασίς ἐστι θείας δυνάμεως ἐπὶ πάντα τὸν κόσμον (*Stromateis* 6.3.32.4). The passage corresponds to *Exhortation* 1.2.2; 1.8.2, discussed in Chapter Two.

102 τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον καὶ τὸ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ γεγεν(ν)ημένον αἴτιον (*Stromateis* 6.9.78.5.16–17).

103 *Stromateis* 6.9.78.5.18–19.

things becomes apparent to them. It is thus, from the theological vantage point, that they know “the creation in its entirety ... from the establishment of the world to its end.”¹⁰⁴ These excerpts confirm the conclusion derived from Abraham’s three-day journey concerning gnostic contemplation as a complex grasp of reality.

This evidence contradicts Lilla’s view that the “holy gnostics” use curricular sciences in order to sever their ties with the body, the earth, and the visible cosmos in spiritualist fashion, to be completely absorbed in divine contemplation¹⁰⁵—or in the “glittering realms of supernal radiance” beyond the physical reality, to paraphrase another of Lovecraft’s phrases.¹⁰⁶ As he was not against the sciences, Clement was not against the body or the cosmos either. We know from Chapter Two that for him the cosmos is harmoniously structured and theologically meaningful, and that the human body itself is a tuneful instrument on which the Logos plays the cosmic song. By showing so consistent an interest in understanding the universe, Clement articulated a genuine theory of natural philosophy—one that expressed itself in Platonic and Stoic idioms, but which nonetheless communicated Christian wisdom.

I draw this section to a close by considering another passage where the two perspectives on the cosmos intersect, from below and from above. Here is the text:

According to the rule of truth pertaining to gnostic tradition, the discourse on nature (φυσιολογία)—or rather the highest vision (ἐποπτεία)—begins with the exposition on cosmogony (κοσμογονίας λόγος) and then ascends to the theological perspective (τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος).¹⁰⁷

The excerpt focuses on the curricular progress from physics, or physiology, to the vision of high things—epoptics or theology—by addressing the discourse on cosmogony. It is a reference to the three stages of natural contemplation, discussed earlier, description (physics), interpretation (cosmogony), and vision (theology). In words already familiar, the passage refers to advancement from the “little mysteries” to the “greater ones.”¹⁰⁸ On closer inspection the passage also refers to both dimensions of Clement’s approach, from below and from

104 περί τε γενέσεως ἀπάσης ... ἐκ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἰς τέλος (*Stromateis* 6.9.78.5.20–22).

105 Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 169–170.

106 Lovecraft, “Beyond the Wall of Sleep,” 40.

107 *Stromateis* 4.1.3.2. For an exhaustive analysis of this passage, see Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 43–76.

108 *Stromateis* 4.1.3.1; 5.11.71.1–4.

above. While his allusion to the bottom-up curricular stages of physiology is transparent, the passage includes two new elements, both pointing to the top-down, theological approach. The first is the “rule of truth pertaining to the gnostic tradition” (ἡ κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀληθείας κανόνα γνωστικῆς παραδόσεως),¹⁰⁹ which denotes the theological framework of the entire process, anchored in divine revelation. In this context, the “highest vision” does not mean contemplating God; the epoptic view refers to seeing created nature from God’s vantage point. After all, this passage is about φυσιολογία, natural philosophy. This amounts to saying that physics and cosmogony in a Christian sense require a theological criterion. We already know that the epoptic lens is not only the end of the curriculum, but that it virtually accompanies the quest for knowledge from beginning to end. As such, in the above passage and elsewhere¹¹⁰ Clement refers to a curricular progression *within* the epoptic, theological framework. The second new element is a scriptural allusion. In discussing this excerpt, Blowers and Bucur identified the theological dimension in the phrase “the exposition on cosmogony” (κοσμογονίας λόγου), which they interpreted as referring to the Genesis narrative of creation.¹¹¹ I concur. The theological framework is scriptural, drawing on the text on the origins of the universe.

Therefore, two factors denote the theological framework within our passage. One is the epoptic lens—subjective, personally acquired, and traditionally authenticated—and the other is the scriptural narrative—which supplies the process with an objective, written dimension. It is within this framework that the “holy gnostic” pursues the scientific, rigorously curricular exploration of nature. These findings confirm my assessment that, in Clement, cosmology and theology together with faith and science are inextricably fused. The same goes for the literary context of this passage. Both before it¹¹² and in the next portion of the text,¹¹³ indeed, the context prefaces cosmological investigations by overviews of theology and references to the narrative of creation.

In summary, building upon ethical criteria, gnostic physics or natural contemplation requires adherence to scriptural wisdom, awareness of the available scientific information, and theological insight. Accordingly, the gnostic explores the cosmos in scientific fashion—or relies on the science of others—and interprets it theologically within the authenticated framework of the nar-

109 *Stromateis* 4.1.3.2.1.

110 *Stromateis* 1.1.15.2. Gregory of Nyssa echoes this approach in *Apology* 8.17.2–7.

111 Blowers, *Drama*, 37, 317. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 23. For Clement’s views of cosmogony, see Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 143–150; Méhat, *Étude*, 442–445.

112 *Stromateis* 4.1.2.1–2.

113 *Stromateis* 4.1.3.3.

rative of creation. Anticipating Basil, whose contributions I review in Chapter Five, Clement construes the sciences and scriptural faith as complementing each other. The best way to articulate his views is by identifying them, respectively, with analysis and interpretation, or description and understanding.

1.3 *Performing Natural Contemplation*

After examining the prerequisites of Clement's physics, I must now turn to natural contemplation proper. It takes the form of a structured process within the threefold curriculum. I already stated my conviction that the second curricular stage, physics, accommodates three more steps: description, interpretation, and vision. In a passage discussed just above, these stages correspond to physiology, cosmogony, and theology.¹¹⁴ In what follows I address the content and the purposes of these steps, after which I exemplify their workings by analysing select passages from Clement's works. While the elements lie in the open—scattered especially throughout *Stromateis* and *Selections*—the reconstruction of the method belongs to me. Clement deploys it without bothering to present it systematically.

For descriptive purposes, the “holy gnostics” draw upon the established scientific view of the universe, nature, and phenomena, seeking to understand what they are and, possibly, how they work. To obtain an accurate description of reality and thus overcome confusion, they must work with the available methods and data. Collecting information and analysing it constitutes the first element of the method. In turn, interpretation means to translate scientific information into a faith-based worldview. This entails considering things through the lens of the mindset, values, and aspirations of the interpreters. In principle, interpretation requires the framework of the scriptural doctrine of creation. We discovered in Chapter Two that several early Christian theologians—before Clement and after him—preferred to consider reality from an equally useful viewpoint, the church's experience in the liturgy. Either way, through the method's second step, scientific cosmology, or physics more broadly, becomes integral to the Christian worldview. This view of interpretation is not the same as Rizzerio's sense of interpreting the visible through the lens of the intelligible,¹¹⁵ which corresponds to the third stage of physics in my rendition of the system. Scientifically aware Christians of mature faith could readily succeed up to this point of the contemplative process. Vision, however, is the province of the “holy gnostics,” the polymaths who reach spiritual perfec-

114 *Stromateis* 4.1.3.2.

115 Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 221.

tion. This is because vision entails a panoramic grasp of reality, a divine bird's eye view. And this is at hand only for those who, communing with God and becoming deified, consider the world through transfigured senses. Only they who attain God's vision—the epoptic stage—can succeed in cosmic vision. Having accomplished the last stage of the curriculum and being possessed of such unusual capabilities, the “holy gnostics” comprehend the whole and the parts, the past, the present, as well as the future of the universe. The grasp of reality they acquire—to paraphrase Lovecraft again—winds out of sight in all directions.¹¹⁶

In my reconstruction, the first stage, corresponding to the first day of Abraham's journey,¹¹⁷ includes the application of a consistent method, worthy of the name of science. Gnosis is, after all, the “science of reality as it is” (ἐπιστήμη τοῦ ὄντος αὐτοῦ) obtained in “agreement” (σύμφωνος) with the researchers who consider the various parts of the physical world.¹¹⁸ Science emerges where the subject, the researchers, and the object, reality, meet. To articulate this phenomenological bridge between the subject and the object, Clement differentiates four branches of physics: science (ἐπιστήμη) as research or experimental science of things as they are and how they are (ἐμπειρία); the theoretical science of grasping the species, general and particular (εἰδησις); the science of relations, establishing how things hold together within the cosmos (σύνεσις); and understanding the intelligible side of reality (νόησις).¹¹⁹ This concern for the method places him among the pioneers of science in late antiquity.

Against this multidisciplinary backdrop, the premiss of the method is that the nature of things can be described, but not understood, or at least not fully. In Clement's words,

The explanatory definition regarding the essence (οὐσία) of a given thing cannot grasp (περιλαβεῖν) the thing's nature with precision (ἀκριβῶς); instead, it produces a description of the essence through the most important traits (εἰδῶν; of the species), roughly establishing (its definition) upon the quality (ποιότητι) of the essence.¹²⁰

116 Lovecraft, “Dagon,” 25.

117 *Stromateis* 5.11.73.2–3.

118 *Stromateis* 2.17.76.3.

119 *Stromateis* 2.17.76.2. These distinctions evoke Plato's views of science discussed in Brisson, “Plato's Natural Philosophy,” 215–216. For Clement's scientific leanings, see Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 106–107.

120 *Stromateis* 8.6.21.6. See also the comments of Havrda, *The So-Called Eighth Stromateus*, 240.

Together with employing the Aristotelian categories of essence and quality,¹²¹ the passage denotes the same epistemological scepticism noted above, a humble approach to reality. One might call this an apophaticism of nature,¹²² tantamount to refusing to exhaust reality by way of definitions.¹²³ This attitude might echo Plato's sense that there is no true knowledge of physical reality, and that at best we understand this reality through a "likely account."¹²⁴ The nature of things can be known only by approximation, by conjecturing about its manifestations, never in itself. This is not far from the modern representation of the cosmos through models, mathematical or otherwise. In an address to the Prussian Academy of Sciences (Berlin, 27 January 1921), Albert Einstein famously observed that, "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality."¹²⁵ Incidentally, Rizzerio showed that, elsewhere, Clement deploys mathematical models in order to secure a level of certainty.¹²⁶ But what matters more is that, in taking Aristotle's naturalism as a starting point, the method of Clement progresses towards a Platonic perception of reality. The two sides of the method match the four disciplinary approaches to a tee.

What conditions Clement's prudent attitude are epistemological and ontological factors, such as the mind's uncertainties and reality's complex structure. Human mind is unstable and unreliable (see τὸ ἀβέβαιον τῆς διανοίας), while nature entails discrepancy and inconsistency (see διαφωνία).¹²⁷ In an ontological sense, the physical universe unfolds by way of a complex web of differences and connections: "within the cosmos as a whole, the totality of the parts both differ (διαφέρηται) from one another and preserve their relationship (τὴν οἰκειότητα διαφυλάττει) with the whole."¹²⁸ Reality's components simultaneously

121 Aristotle, *The categories* 2a11–14; 8b25–26.

122 What inspired my phrase "apophaticism of nature" is Lossky's point that theology must adopt "a sort of apophaticism" in regards to the cosmos. See *Mystical Theology*, 91. Florovsky already suggested the same when he spoke of the "mystery of creation." See Georges Florovsky, *Aspects of Church History*, Collected Works 4 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), 39–62, esp. 59.

123 Here I echo Yannaras' view of apophaticism as "refusal to exhaust knowledge of the truth in its formulation." Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, trans. Keith Schram (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 17.

124 I am grateful to David Runia for the Platonic connection.

125 Albert Einstein, "Geometry and Experience," quoted in Alice Calaprice, *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 371. For a similar understanding, see Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 12.

126 Rizzerio, "La transcendence divine," 164–167.

127 *Stromateis* 8.7.22.1–2. See Havrda, *The So-Called Eighth Stromateus*, 241–243.

128 *Stromateis* 1.13.57.5.

converge and diverge. The inconsistency of nature further weakens our unreliable perception of the universe as unity and difference. Accordingly, and in an epistemological sense, science examines what differs (κατ' εἶδος) and what is unitary (καθ' ὅλου) in nature.¹²⁹ But an ultimate equation, accounting for reality's fundamental algorithm where unity and diversity cohere, is inconceivable. Thus, whether epistemologically or ontologically seen, reality is not easy to grasp in a single formula. Hence Clement's scepticism.

Noteworthy is that the "holy gnostics" consider reality as veritable scientists, methodically. Given reality's twofold aspect—as diversity and unity—they approach it from corresponding angles, analytically and synthetically. Analysis and synthesis are another way of referring to the methods earlier mentioned, namely, empirical or experimental science, the science of relations, and understanding.¹³⁰ A typical example of analysis, accounting for cosmic diversity, is the Aristotelian division of reality into the earthly zone and the translunar region or the physical universe. Thus, in an attempt to translate the scriptural heaven and earth, at Genesis 1:1, by way of cultural categories, Clement discriminated between "things earthly and celestial things."¹³¹ A typical example of synthesis, accounting for cosmic homogeneity, or unity, refers to the scientific discovery that the parts of the universe are made of the same stuff. They are οὐσίαι ὑλικαί ("material essences").¹³² This double approach echoes the Platonic method of gathering and dividing,¹³³ also employed, we discovered in Chapter Two, by Irenaeus.

In the light of the above, the first stage of natural contemplation presupposes awareness of the available sciences and the ability of researchers to explore and describe the world rigorously.¹³⁴ The second stage, in turn, consists in the interpretation of the universe within the framework of scriptural theology or more broadly the faith-based worldview. In a previously analysed passage, this phase is signified by a reference to cosmogony.¹³⁵ But my discussion of musical metaphors and analogies in Chapter Two covers better this part of Clement's curriculum. For this reason, I provide below only a few additional examples.

129 *Stromateis* 2.17.76.3.

130 *Stromateis* 2.17.76.2.

131 *Selections* 3.1.

132 *Selections* 2.3.

133 *Phaedrus* 265de; *Philebus* 16c–17a. Later centuries associated this method with the "Chalcedonian logic" mentioned in Chapter Two. See also Costache, "Transdisciplinary Carats," 151–154.

134 For other examples, see Rizzerio, *Clemente di Alessandria*, 261–266.

135 *Stromateis* 4.1.3.2.

I begin with a scriptural antecedent, which gives Clement an opportunity to exercise the first two stages in one go. The passage in question is the rewriting of Gen 1:2–3 (the emergence of light or order out of chaos) at 1Pet 2:9 (God's people's transference from darkness to light). The gnostics draw upon this antecedent when they consider the transition of believers from spiritual death to life analogous to matter's movement from darkness to light or from chaos to order. As the divine will organises the universe, so the "saviour's teaching" and the gift of "baptismal regeneration" save the believers.¹³⁶ In Clement's words, "bringing us out of disorder, the Lord illumines us and leads us to an unclouded light, wholly immaterial."¹³⁷ This sentence speaks of the cosmos only implicitly: the rebirth of believers clarifies the phenomena associated with the beginning of the universe. What matters is that their experience is a hermeneutical lens for deciphering cosmogony. But their spiritual rebirth further heralds the eschatological destiny of the cosmos. As they experience God's "wholly immaterial," uncreated radiance—in the here and now—the same "unclouded light" will one day permeate the universe in its entirety. Corresponding to Ignatius' liturgical cosmos, the church and the universe correspond to one other. The undisclosed assumption behind Clement's understanding is that the universe and humankind are connected, thus the anthropic principle. In Chapter One we encountered a similar conviction in the Disciple's thinking, Clement's contemporary. We retain that the "holy gnostic" discerns a nexus between the church and the cosmos, reminiscent of what Joshua Lollar studied as the relation between temple and cosmos.¹³⁸

This correspondence between the church and the cosmos facilitates the interpretation of the universe from a scriptural vantage point. Drawing upon the Scriptures, the "holy gnostics" perceive the world as a continuous doxology addressed to the creator. What prompts this representation is a string of passages and allusions, from the song of the three youths in LXX Dan 3:36–40 to Gen 1:1–2 to Ps 102:20.¹³⁹ Behind this doxological perception of reality lies the related assumption—discussed in Chapter Two—that the cosmos is the very song of the Logos, embodied revelation.¹⁴⁰ This perception also echoes Irenaeus' approach and anticipates Athanasius' textual universe. The cosmos

136 *Selections* 5.2.

137 *Selections* 5.3.

138 Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 106–107.

139 *Selections* 1.1–5. This approach corresponds to his broader take on the Book of Psalms, encountered in Chapter Two. See *Exhortation* 1.2.4; 1.4.4; 1.6.1; 1.6.5; 1.7.3. See Lorenzo Perrone, "La presenza della *Genesi* nelle *Omellerie sui Salmi* di Origene," *Adamantius* 23 (2017): 147–166.

140 *Exhortation* 1.2.2; 1.5.2; 1.8.2. See Costache, "Meaningful Cosmos," 108–111, 125–129.

as both revelation and doxology mediates access to the divine the way an icon does. In Clement's words, as the gnostics infer humankind's unity from the fact of being made in God's image, "through (contemplating) things created" they "revere God's energy and will."¹⁴¹ They view the cosmos, reverentially, as theophany or hierophany therefore, as a privileged locus for meeting the divine. I already mentioned in the introduction to this book that I take the established terminology of hierophany and theophany in their widest of senses, cosmologically.

Turning to the third stage and as I pointed out earlier, in putting on the mind of Christ (cf. Phil 2:5) the "holy gnostics" grasp reality in a manner beyond the ordinary. In the Abraham episode, this stage appears as contemplating reality in the light of Christ's resurrection.¹⁴² It is a view of things from above—a reversed epoptic as it were, which, instead of aiming at God's mystery, glances at the cosmos from the divine vantage point. This vantage is primarily christological. As the cause and the measure of all things,¹⁴³ Christ possesses the full knowledge of the universe.¹⁴⁴ By communing with him and by undergoing transformation, the gnostics access reality the way the "Son of God"¹⁴⁵ and the angels do.¹⁴⁶ They are therefore endowed with the unusual capacity to grasp, at a glance, the parts and the whole, the present, the past, and the future of the universe.¹⁴⁷ Although Clement maintains silence about what can one understand about the universe in this fashion,¹⁴⁸ important hints are at times discernible. One such hint is the reference to seeing all the times and the ages intersecting within the present, simultaneously.¹⁴⁹ This piecing things together significantly differs from the usual process of discovering common denominators and relationships gradually. The gnostics display an extraordinary, divine-like sense-perception, a synchronous grasp of the whole and its parts; this is a recurrent motif within the Christian tradition, east and west.¹⁵⁰ As Clement tells us,

¹⁴¹ *Stromateis* 7.14.86.2.

¹⁴² *Stromateis* 5.11.73.2–3.

¹⁴³ *Exhortation* 1.5; 6.69; *Stromateis* 1.29.182.2; *Selections* 18.2.

¹⁴⁴ *Stromateis* 6.8.70.2.

¹⁴⁵ *Stromateis* 6.8.68.2. As Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 199, pointed out, the gnostics know in a "lordly" fashion.

¹⁴⁶ *Selections* 57.5. See Bucur, "Hierarchy," 27.

¹⁴⁷ *Stromateis* 6.9.78.5.

¹⁴⁸ According to Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 163–164 and Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy," 17–24, this strategy of silence is consistent with Clement's view that this kind of insight is reserved for advanced seekers.

¹⁴⁹ *Exhortation* 9.84.5–6.

¹⁵⁰ This grasp of reality also features in Adomnán of Iona's (d. 704) description of Columba's

It is through a new eye, a renewed hearing, and a new heart that the Lord's disciples speak about, hear, and approach all things visible, audible, and comprehensible: that is, spiritually (πνευματικῶς), with faith and understanding (διὰ τῆς πίστεως καὶ συνέσεως).¹⁵¹

This spiritual insight denotes the transformation of those who commune with God.¹⁵² That it requires transformation is obvious elsewhere, as the “holy gnostics” surmise the unity of the creation from their own tranquility. Specifically, inner personal peace and the beautiful harmony of the contraries within the universe mirror each other.¹⁵³ But this extraordinary grasp of reality is neither perfect nor complete; as in Paul's case, it ever spirals, asymptotically, towards perfection and completeness.¹⁵⁴ What matters is that, while the first two stages bridge science and theology, vision transcends both. Rizzerio's theory that Clement allowed for a disciplinary acquisition of supreme gnosis¹⁵⁵ does not

(d. 597) ecstatic vision. Through grace and in a special state of mind, Columba saw the whole cosmos “unified as a single ray of the sun” (*veluti uno solis radio collectum*). *Columba* 1.1 (see also 1.35). While Adomnán's depiction reminds one of a starship entering the hyperspace—of contemporary science fiction—Columba was completely still during his vision. This perception is not unique. In eastern Christianity, Diadochus of Photiki (d. ca. 500) metaphorically referred to the spiritual perception of the world as aerial, diaphanous, and luminous. Here is the relevant passage: “having the soul's contemplative part ever clear, we must persist in unwaveringly cultivating our divine visions (θείοις θεωρήμασι), seeing what pertains to the light in the air's light (ἐν ἀέρι φωτὸς τὰ τοῦ φωτὸς ὁρῶντας); this actually is the light of true gnosis.” *Texts* 75.13–16. In Chapter Five we shall discover several more examples from throughout the tradition. The source of this tradition could be Origen's reference to “the righteous (who, eschatologically,) will no longer shine differently, as before, but will all be as a single sun (οἱ πάντες ὡς εἷς ἥλιος).” *Commentary on Matthew* 10.3.2–3. Typically, Origen was more interested in the destiny of the church—the community of believers—than in the cosmos. In Chapter Two we discovered his similar rendition of Clement's theme of the polyphonic instrument in anthropological key.

151 *Stromateis* 2.4.15.3. For a synthesis of relevant patristic positions, see Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions*, 112–114.

152 *Exhortation* 1.4.3; 10.93.1; *Selections* 56.7.

153 *Stromateis* 4.6.40.3. Here, again, Clement could have borrowed from Philo's Moses, deified and beautiful. See Litwa, “The Deification of Moses,” 18–19.

154 In his words, “not as perfect in knowledge, but as called to perfection” (*The Pedagogue* 1.6.52.3). For Clement's indebtedness to Pauline epistemology, see Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 197–198. Furthermore, Osborn (*Clement of Alexandria*, 208–211) provided a very useful map of the journey to higher knowledge. Cf. Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy,” 9–10 and Méhat, *Étude*, 499–504.

155 Rizzerio, “La transcendence divine,” 173–176.

hold water. Curricular disciplines structure the search for God, but have nothing substantial to say either about the divine per se or about the divine sense-perception of the gnostics.

To conclude, Clement was committed to what he called “gnostic tradition” and “ecclesiastical gnosis.” He was also highly educated, fully adhering to the principles of classical *paideia*, which he articulated along the lines of the tripartite curriculum. This curriculum prescribed advancement from ethical formation to natural contemplation to the supreme vision. Clement developed the contemplation of the natural world into another triadic pattern, that is, description, interpretation, and vision. This proves that, for him, the contemplation of nature is not about escaping the world. It is the desire to comprehend it better and more fully by deploying disciplinary tools, the perceptions of faith, scriptural wisdom, and the ability to survey all things divinely. While description and interpretation offer an accurate—but common—view of the universe, vision amounts to revelational insights, perhaps associated with extrasensory and ecstatic experiences. In outlining these stages, Clement produced the first known Christian theory of natural contemplation.

As interesting as this contemplative framework might be, it should not be considered apart from its protagonists. Central to it are the figures of the saintly persons—dubbed “holy gnostics”—having their perfect illustration in scriptural figures such as Abraham and Moses. The “holy gnostics” also display features of the classical sage and the Platonic mystic, but recalibrated to the scriptural view of holiness. As polymaths and saintly persons, the Clementine gnostics remain deeply interested in the cosmos, which they grasp in a theocentric perspective and through extraordinary insights. This, obviously, makes for a special case of the early Christian view of humankind within the cosmos. Its echoes permeate later monastic tradition in regard to the saints who change the world according to the measure of their own transformation.¹⁵⁶

It is these parameters of natural contemplation filtered through the experience of the “holy gnostics” that marked Clement’s descendants in the tradition in various ways. And while his immediate intellectual heir, Origen, both disliked him and took a different approach to contemplation, the later Alexandrian theologians notably iterated Clement’s approach.

156 Costache, “John Moschus,” 28–33; “Adam’s Holiness in the Alexandrine and Athonite Traditions,” in *Alexandrian Legacy*, 322–368, esp. 337–340.

2 Origen

In many ways, Origen's¹⁵⁷ contributions represent for scriptural exegesis what Clement's input represents for the encounter between Christianity and the scientific culture of their time. The same breadth of knowledge and the same charismatic genius transpire through his immense literary output,¹⁵⁸ as they do also in Clement's case. But while Clement considered a wide variety of topics—not deciding upon scriptural exegesis as his primary goal—Origen resolved to survey the same terrain through the lens of scriptural wisdom.¹⁵⁹ Accordingly, he chose exegesis as the setting of his theological and spiritual investigations.¹⁶⁰ He did so to such an extent, that, as Peter Martens proved, scriptural exegesis became integral to his own spiritual journey.¹⁶¹ There are exceptions, of course, such as his polemical treatise *Against Celsus* and the overwhelmingly complex *Principles*. What is remarkable about these works, however, is that even here Origen turns to the Scriptures, time and again, to substantiate his views.¹⁶² His scriptural horizon governs the way he sees the cosmos—that is, in exegetical fashion, through the mirror of the sacred page.¹⁶³ It is from this literary ground that he contemplates the world within a complex framework, theological, spiritual, and eschatological.

157 His biography is established in great detail. John Behr (ed. and trans.), "Introduction" to *Origen: On First Principles*, OECT (Oxford University Press, 2017), vol. 1:xv–viii, esp. xvii–xx. Henri Crouzel, *Origène*, Le Sycomore (Paris and Namur: Lethielleux and Culture et vérité, 1985), 17–61. Jean Daniélou, *Origène*, GC (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), 19–40. Heine, "The Alexandrians," 121–122. John A. McGuckin, "The Life of Origen (ca 186–255)" in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin, WHCT (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 1–23.

158 Various scholars offered surveys of his literary corpus. Crouzel, *Origène*, 63–78. Heine, "The Alexandrians," 123–127. John A. McGuckin, "The Scholarly Works of Origen" in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 25–41.

159 For a brief comparison between the two men, see Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 100–101.

160 Pamphilus, Origen's defender, corroborated this point. See Pamphilus, *Apology* 9.1–8. Contemporary scholars agree. Behr, *Christian Theology*, 1:163–201. Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 96. Crouzel, *Origène*, 83–84. Fearghus Ó Fearghail, "Philo and the Fathers: The Letter and the Spirit," in *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin and Portland: Four Courts Press, 1995), 39–59, esp. 56. Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, second edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53. Lyman, *Chriology and Cosmology*, 40–41.

161 Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 4–6, 243–244.

162 Blowers, *Drama*, 37.

163 Blowers, *Drama*, 153–154, 318–319.

That said, as his writings demonstrate, Origen's attention is not exclusively turned towards things on high and contemplative prospects. Nor is he an arm-chair theologian. While his discourse is anchored in scriptural wisdom, ascetic experience, and the eschatological condition of the world, it does so with a view to conversing with the ideas of his time.¹⁶⁴ His works are written for living audiences, not for the purposes of abstract knowledge; they address the issues and the concerns of his first readers; they should not be examined in isolation from those concerns.¹⁶⁵ By all intents and purposes, Origen was a pastorally committed churchman who aimed at strengthening—and rectifying, as the case may be—the faith of his fellow believers, serving ultimately their spiritual wellbeing, progress, and transformation.¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, throughout his corpus of writings he unequivocally affirms people's calling to advance towards perfection—stage by stage—from basic existence to purification to charismata

164 Crouzel, *Origène*, 207–209. Daniélou, *Origène*, 85–108, 208–211. Charlotte Köckert, “Didymus the Blind and Origen as Commentators on Genesis: A Comparison,” in *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer*, ed. Sylvia Kaczmarek and Henryk Pietras, BETL 244 (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2011), 407–418, esp. 415. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 43–45, 80. David T. Runia, “Origen and Hellenism,” in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:43–47, esp. 45–46.

165 Alain Le Boulluec, *Alexandrie antique et chrétienne: Clément et Origène*, ed. Carmelo Giuseppe Conticello, EASA 178 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2006), 221–232. Crouzel, *Origène*, 33, 85, 211–212, 216. Daniélou, *Origène*, 85. Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis*, BAC 3 (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2005), 40–46. Marguerite Harl, “La préexistence des âmes dans l'oeuvre d'Origène,” in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies, ITS 19 (Innsbruck and Wien: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 238–258, esp. 241–242. Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: L'Intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*, Théologie 16 (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1950), 47–91. Perrone, “Christianity as ‘Practice’ in Origen,” 293–317.

166 *Principles* 1.pref.1.3–6; 1.pref.2.21–34. Especially the first of these passages sets an “existential” tone for the entire discourse—a discourse more often than not considered intellectual speculation. The text quoted throughout is Rufinus' Latin version, from Behr's edition, *Origen: On First Principles* (2017). Origen's position finds confirmation in Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 7.93–98. The formative dimension of Origen's discourse has not escaped scholars. Marie Odile Boulnois, “Chronique d'une découverte et de ses retombées scientifiques: Les nouvelles *Homélies sur les Psaumes* d'Origène,” *RET* 5 (2015–2016): 351–362, esp. 359. Crouzel, *Origène*, 83–84. Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48. Daniélou, *Origène*, 65–83, 109–134. Marguerite Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens: Études sur l'herméneutique chrétienne d'Origène à Grégoire de Nysse*, CEA 135 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 226. Henri de Lubac, “Introduction” to *Origène: Homélies sur la Genèse*, trans. Louis Doutreleau, SC 7 (Paris: Cerf, 1943), 5–62, esp. 26–30. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 40. Trigg, *Origen*, 18.

to glory.¹⁶⁷ He also believes that there are many paths leading to perfection or holiness,¹⁶⁸ whose common factors are conversion and prayerfulness.¹⁶⁹

All the same, against the backdrop of his overriding concern for holiness and things spiritual, Origen has much to say about the world and humankind's relation with it, scriptural wisdom being instrumental towards articulating his views. In what follows, I first discuss the methodology of his most controversial work, *Principles*, together with his own spiritual profile, and then turn to his *Song* and *Homily* and the contemplative exercises to be found therein, and finish with a quick essay of the contours of his cosmos.

These and other sources indicate that central to Origen's thought is a strong connection between the contemplative person and natural contemplation. As for Clement, so too with Origen: the implicit and explicit subject of all experiences is the holy person, whom he calls the "perfect" or "spiritual."¹⁷⁰ No wonder the space he allocates for the classical threefold schema,¹⁷¹ which shapes the holy sage. But, considered through the lens of his late antique biographies—corroborated by internal evidence and contemporary research—it appears that what primarily informs his relevant views—as much as in Clement's case—is his own spiritual trajectory.¹⁷² In turn, his own saintly life, magnified by his extensive training in the heuristic pedagogy of the ancients, profoundly shaped his literary output. No wonder his works generally address readers capable of both assessing the issues of the spiritual life and of profiting from the intellectual nuances of his pedagogical approach.¹⁷³ For example,

167 *Principles* 1.3.8.220–242; 2.2.1; 2.3.7.435–438; 3.6.1.6–8. See Crouzel, *Origène*, 130–137 and Daniélou, *Origène*, 297–299.

168 Crouzel, *Origène*, 181–199.

169 Rusch, "On Being a Christian," 321–322.

170 Crouzel, *Origène*, 139–140, 160.

171 Louth, *Origins*, 56–60. Michael Vlad Niculescu, "Spiritual Leavening: The Communication and Reception of the Good News in Origen's Biblical Exegesis and Transformative Pedagogy," *J ECS* 15:4 (2007): 447–481, esp. 465–468.

172 Gregory Thaumaturgus acknowledges his sainthood. *Address* 2.10.17–20; 2.13.31–35; 4.40.33–34 (ἱερὸς ἀνὴρ, "holy man"); 6.84.76 (θεῖος ἄνθρωπος, "divine man"); 10.131.26 (τὸν μακάριον αὐτοῦ βίον, "his beatific life"); 11.135.16 (σοφός, "sage"). The same goes for a number of scholars. Mario Baghos, "The Conflicting Portrayals of Origen in the Byzantine Tradition," *Phronema* 30:2 (2015): 69–104, esp. 85–103. Boulnois, "Chronique," 358–359. Henri Crouzel, "Introduction" to *Grégoire le Thaumaturge: Remerciements*, 11–92, esp. 76–78. Crouzel, *Origène*, 163–166. Mihály Kránitz, "Tracce del Monachesimo Primitivo nell'*anakhôrê* di Origene," in *Origeniana Octava*, 2:1009–1015, esp. 1014–1015. Torjesen, "The Inspired Interpreter," 295. Joseph Trigg, *Origen*, ECF (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

173 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 6.73–80. Only advanced students could appreciate Origen's "saintly teachings," Gregory later added (*Address* 19.204.2–3). Enrico Dal Covolo, "Sac-

as Köckert noted, his largely lost *Commentary on Genesis* was written for his most advanced students.¹⁷⁴ That Origen's later detractors and accusers were not equipped for this kind of discourse¹⁷⁵—which accounts for his posthumous condemnation—is not the concern of this study.

2.1 *A Methodological Prelude*

As mentioned above, the treatise of immediate interest here, *Principles*,¹⁷⁶ is the most controversial of Origen's writings. It became so very soon after he published it, creating more of a stir than his earlier released *Commentary*.¹⁷⁷ Readers who knew him personally, or who underwent the corresponding training, assessed *Principles* as it should have been, critically and heuristically,¹⁷⁸ and against the backdrop of his other writings.¹⁷⁹ But his late antique detractors read it in isolation from the corpus and—taking its discourse at face value, abstractly and simplistically, as a dogmatic statement—found it to be a ground for suspicion and condemnation. No wonder soon after Origen's death Pamphilus demanded that he and his ideas be treated fairly.¹⁸⁰ Contemporary scholars are in agreement.¹⁸¹

The accusers took offence at what they considered to be his definitive pronouncements on the preexistence of souls, the eschatological restoration of

erdozio dei Fedeli, Gerarchia della Santità e Gerarchia Ministeriale in alcune Omelie di Origene,” in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:605–611, esp. 606, 608. Crouzel, *Origène*, 84, 86, 210–212, 219–221. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 45. Peter W. Martens, “Interpreting Attentively: The Ascetic Character of Biblical Exegesis according to Origen and Basil of Caesarea,” in *Origeniana Octava*, 2:115–1121, esp. 1120–1121. Michael Vlad Niculescu, “Changing Moods: Origen's Understanding of Exegesis as a Spiritual Attunement to the Grief and the Joy of a Messianic Teacher,” in *Origeniana Decima*, 179–195, esp. 179–181. Trigg, *Origen*, 9–10.

174 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 224.

175 Pamphilus, *Apology* 13.1–8.

176 For a detailed presentation of this work, see Behr, “Introduction,” xx–lvi. Crouzel, *Origène*, 219–222 discussed the unsystematic nature of the treatise. See also Peter W. Martens, “The Modern Editions of *Peri Archon*,” *J ECS* 28:2 (2020): 303–331, esp. 304–306.

177 Scholars believe that *Principles* was supposed to prove the theological and hermeneutical grounds of his exegesis of Genesis. Behr “Introduction,” lv. Trigg, *Origen*, 17–18. For analyses of *Commentary*, see Köckert, “Didymus and Origen,” 407–418; Ronald E. Heine, “Origen's Alexandrian *Commentary on Genesis*,” in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:63–73. At 66–67, Heine pointed out that Origen's intentions in *Commentary* and *Principles* coincide.

178 Mario Girardi, “Origene nell Giudizio di Basilio di Cesarea,” in *Origeniana Octava*, 2:1071–1088.

179 Crouzel, *Origène*, 220–221, 236. Daniélou, *Origène*, 8. Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 33–34.

180 *Apology* 9.8–11.6.

181 Crouzel, *Origène*, 344–346. Daley, *Hope*, 60–64. Daniélou, *Origène*, 8. Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 20–30. Lubac, “Introduction,” 7–19. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 121–122. Trigg, *Origen*, 62–66.

the fallen world solely by God's will, and the supposed dematerialisation of the body and the cosmos. That Origen never uses such a phrase as "the pre-existence of souls" and that his discussions took place in polemical contexts escaped their attention. Even apart from the matter of terminology, his teaching on preexistence is far from clear, meaning any given things in a variety of settings.¹⁸² So also escaped the scrutiny of his critics that what he is contemplating under the guise of the original noetic creation is not an immaterial world, but the progress of the church from its blueprint to its eschatological state. Indeed, contemporary scholars proved that the idea of the church is integral to the creation's blueprint.¹⁸³ It also eluded such accusers that his profound sense of freedom, justice, and providence precludes for him the possibility of God's imposing restoration upon rational beings.¹⁸⁴ A number of scholars supplied compelling evidence in this regard.¹⁸⁵ The accusers did not notice, moreover, that Origen preaches the eschatological transformation of all things—that is, changes of condition and shape—not their dematerialisation.¹⁸⁶ Fortunately, this common misunderstanding is under attack too.¹⁸⁷ Nor did the detractors realise that his eschatology is scripturally grounded and

182 Behr, "Introduction," lxxx. Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens*, 247–263. Harl, "Préexistence," 241–247. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 265–266.

183 Benjamin P. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels: Origen's Doctrine of the Soul* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 145. Crouzel, *Origène*, 166–171, 267–342. Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit*, 202–204, 209–211, 216–217. Harl, "Préexistence," 247–248, 251. For a contrary view, see Trigg, *Origen*, 30–32.

184 Book 3 of *Principles* discusses the many facets of creation's freedom. For more succinct articulations of the matters, see *Principles* 2.9.4.83–96; 2.9.6; 2.9.7.196–198; 3.1.1–24; 3.5.8.161–163, 170–71. Cf. *Commentary* 7.70.22–74.18. In *Principles* 2.9.8, we see Origen expanding on the need of purification in the here and now, without which there is no way of progressing in the future ages.

185 Blowers, *Drama*, 107. Crouzel, *Origène*, 84–85. Daley, *Hope*, 58–59. Daniélou, *Origène*, 207–211. Harl, "Préexistence," 252. Jaeger, *Early Christianity*, 65. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 117–118. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 80. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 133–136. Mark S.M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 66–72, 75–78, 161–166.

186 *Principles* 1.6.4. For a related anthropological discussion, see *Principles* 2.3.2. Furthermore, in *Principles* 2.3.7 he discusses three possible futures of the universe (bodiless, transfigured, and as the outermost sphere of the saints).

187 Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 111, 122, 220, 267. Gabriel Bunge, "'Créé pour être': A propos d'une citation scripturaire inaperçue dans le *Peri Archon* d'Origène (111, 5,6)," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 97.1 (1997): 21–29, esp. 22–24. Daley, *Hope*, 51–53. Samuel Fernández, "La fine e la Genesi: Rapporto tra escatologia e protologia nel *De principiis* di Origene," *Adamantius* 23 (2017): 167–180, esp. 174–175. Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Origen on the Human Body," in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:649–656, esp. 654–655. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 259–262.

complex, both “realised” in the here and now, and pointing to the end times.¹⁸⁸ Origen’s eschatology is not, to paraphrase Lovecraft, awestruck at “glimpses into a past beyond conception,”¹⁸⁹ focused on the future retrieval of things that had been lost before the world was made. And again as Lovecraft would have it, his worldview amounts to “glimpses of the ways that were and the ways that might be, as of the ways that are.”¹⁹⁰ Finally, the critics never grasped his very positive view of matter’s goodness, incompatible with the idea that it needs to be eradicated.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, these accusations, eddying eccentrically from the end of the third century onwards, led to his “ecumenical” condemnation in the sixth century. What prompted the anathema were the questionable grounds that certain monastic milieus—more or less sophisticated—claimed to have drawn on his teachings.¹⁹² This resulted in the destruction of the original text of *Principles*, which reached us only in Rufinus’ Latin adaptation, with a few Greek fragments surviving here and there.¹⁹³

Contemporary scholars have exposed the political rationale behind Origen’s posthumous condemnation; they also brought out the anachronistic approach of his late antique and medieval accusers who judged his views through the lens of later doctrinal orthodoxy.¹⁹⁴ More serious, I propose, is that the detractors assessed *Principles* without grasping Origen’s heuristic pedagogy. These matters are all the more important in that central to the criticisms levelled at Origen to this day are what his ancient critics took for outright metaphysical and cosmological statements. His views, I contend, cannot be treated at face value, but require heuristic deciphering, that is, the same method by which they had been delivered to his students. They also require the awareness that his think-

188 Daley, *Hope*, 48–50, 54–55. In turn, Emanuela Prinzivalli, *Magister Ecclesiae: Il dibattito su Origene fra III e IV secolo*, SEA 82 (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2002), 66–70, argued that what largely shapes Origen’s eschatology is his refutation of millennialism.

189 Lovecraft, “Dagon,” 26.

190 Lovecraft, “The White Ship,” 60.

191 Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 43–45. Daniélou, *Origène*, 208–211, 215. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 278–293. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 58. Rusch, “On Being a Christian,” 324.

192 Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 85–158. The most comprehensive dossier of Origen’s defenders and accusers can be found in Prinzivalli, *Magister Ecclesiae*.

193 Behr, “Introduction,” xx–viii, lxxxix–xcvi. Martens, “Modern Editions,” 306–330. McGuckin, “The Scholarly Works of Origen,” 36–37.

194 Behr, “Introduction,” xvi. Crouzel, *Origène*, 223–235. Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, “Il problema delle citazioni del Peri Archon nella Lettera a Mena di Giustiniano,” in *Origeniana Quarta*, 54–76.

ing arises from a perception of Christianity as existential, ethical, and practical philosophy, not as an ideology.¹⁹⁵ This is to say that his views prioritise what Pierre Hadot calls “philosophy as a way of life” to the ideological aspect of the discourse.¹⁹⁶ It is for this reason that consideration of his method is paramount.

It is noteworthy that, recently, scholars have begun to question the metaphysical appraisal of his thinking, instead describing his approach as hermeneutical.¹⁹⁷ Köckert demonstrated that Origen’s cosmology stems from his exegesis of Gen 1,¹⁹⁸ not from philosophical assumptions. Others showed that his worldview centres upon Christ, the church, and the destiny of the saints, not on metaphysics.¹⁹⁹ In turn, Behr put forward that within *Principles*, gradually, physics makes room for a theory of spiritual knowledge, the comprehension of which only the reader’s own holiness can access.²⁰⁰ He also convincingly argued against the current scholarly trend of ignoring the abundant scriptural material *Principles* consistently engages.²⁰¹ So many clarifications demand that we look again at Origen’s thinking in *Principles* through a very different lens.

First, there is the meaning of his speculations. According to his disciple, Gregory Thaumaturgus (d. 270), Origen was eclectic, drawing upon the ideas of various philosophical schools,²⁰² without ever surrendering to his sources.²⁰³

195 Daniélou, Origène, 109–134. Niculescu, “Changing Moods,” 191. Domenico Pazzini, “Aretè e Gnosi nel *Commento a Giovanni* di Origene,” in *Origeniana Nona*, 273–284, esp. 273–275. Perrone, “Christianity as ‘Practice’ in Origen,” 305–308.

196 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, tr. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 61, 107, 129, 134, 137, 140.

197 Charles Kannengiesser, “Origen’s Doctrine Transmitted by Antony the Hermit and Athanasius of Alexandria,” in *Origeniana Octava*, 2:889–899, esp. 893–895. Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 19, 59, 139, 244. Niculescu, “Origen and Logocentrism,” 46–69. Mihai Vlad Niculescu, *The Spell of the Logos: Origen’s Exegetic Pedagogy in the Contemporary Debate Regarding Logocentrism*, GECS 10 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 31–37, 235–252. Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis*, PTS 28 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1986), 108–147.

198 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 240–292, 258–259. Similarly, Behr, “Introduction,” lxxviii–lxxix, pointed out the scriptural foundation of Origen’s discourse on preexistence.

199 Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 9–10. Crouzel, *Origène*, 143–144, 166–171, 267–342. Niculescu, “Spiritual Leavening,” 472–474. For the centrality of Christ in a cosmological sense, see *Principles* 2.6.1.1–27; 2.6.3.68–73; 2.9.4.70–82. For the view of the cosmos through the lens of holy life, see *Principles* 3.5.4.77–80.

200 Behr, “Introduction,” lv.

201 Behr, “Introduction,” lix–lx, lxxviii–ix. Earlier, Bunge, “Créé pour être,” 21–29, maintained a similar position.

202 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 13.151.7–153.23.

203 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 15.173.1–2.

Modern scholars confirm this assessment. It has been observed that while the Pythagorean, the Platonic, and the Philonian systems give a certain framework to his cosmology,²⁰⁴ generally his worldview is not reducible to any given philosophical antecedents.²⁰⁵ At least, not in regard to its foundations and its conclusions. Without disregarding the philosophical framework, the best way of decoding Origen's thinking is by examining the scriptural passages from which he infers his stances, together with the perspective in which he interprets them. Scholars have long established that, consistently, his grammatical analyses pave the way for his spiritual thinking, or, I would rather say, for exploring holiness.²⁰⁶ More recently, we saw above, it has become apparent that his spiritual thinking points towards the church as the overarching context for all other topics, including the holy life. In short, his speculations, stemming from his exegetical engagement with Scripture, amount to discussing church life as the nurturing of holiness.

Second, there is his way of dealing with the faith. Far from proposing a didactic discourse on faith from beginning to end, Origen discriminated between authoritative and conjectural items. The items appear under the headings of "apostolic preaching" (*predicatio apostolica*) and "ecclesiastical preaching" (*ecclesiastica predicatio*); the latter refers to theological reflection.²⁰⁷ He unpacks the apostolic preaching in succinct, expository form—sometimes as credal stances²⁰⁸—while theological reflection develops the ideas in amazing spirals. Cosmological speculations feature only within the reflective parts of

204 Crouzel, *Origène*, 214–215. Annewies van den Hoek, "Assessing Philo's Influence in Christian Alexandria: The Case of Origen," in *Shem in the Tents of Japhet: Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism*, ed. James Kugel (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 223–239. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 308–309. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 157–183; *Philo and the Church Fathers*, 117–125. Stroumsa, *Scriptural Universe*, 104. Trigg, *Origen*, 9–10, 12–14.

205 Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 50. Bostock, "Origen and Pythagoreanism," 472, 474–475. Crouzel, *Origène*, 208–210. Daniélou, *Origène*, 85–108. Lubac, "Introduction," 35–39. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 113–114, 126–129. Róbert Somos, "An Aristotelian Science-Methodological Principle in Origen's *Commentary on John*," in *Origeniana Octava*, 1:547–552, esp. 548–549.

206 Daley, *Hope*, 48. Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit*, 131–194. Louth, *Origins*, 56–60, 63. Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit*, 92–150, 178–194. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 122.

207 *Principles* 1.pref.4.46; 1.pref.7.100. Felicitously, Behr ("Introduction," xxx–v, xxxix–xliii) refers to them as the apostolic and the ecclesiastical cycles.

208 This is the case of the material he summarised in the preface. See, for example, *Principles* 1.pref.4 (God, Christ, and the Spirit, creation, revelation); 1.pref.7 (the visible world, which has a beginning and an end; no one knows with certainty what preceded the world and what may follow it); 1.pref.10 (angels and stars).

the discourse, not as authoritative exposition.²⁰⁹ It is against this backdrop that Origen discerns between what is certain and uncertain in the Christian faith. Certain and authoritative is whatever the apostles taught explicitly. By contrast, the theological development of what the apostolic preaching left as mere hints and pointers is uncertain.²¹⁰ Thus, it is certain that the cosmos “was made, beginning to exist at a given time” and that it is heading towards dissolution because of its inherent corruptibility. Uncertain are the hypotheses regarding what preceded the created cosmos and what comes after it; on these counts, there is no authoritative preaching.²¹¹ In Origen’s footsteps, interestingly, while the doctrine of creation appears in later creeds in minimal formulae, cosmology has not become the object of normative teaching.²¹²

Third, there is the function played by curricular disciplines. While theological reflection upon enigmas and pointers cannot match the authority of the apostolic doctrine, Origen does not see this activity as insignificant. For the purposes of developing and clarifying ideas, what Henri Crouzel designated as Origen’s *théologie en recherche* or *théologie en exercice* employs tools borrowed from a range of disciplines, literary, philosophical, and scientific.²¹³ To decipher difficult scriptural passages requires curricular disciplines such as astronomy, geometry, grammar, music, and rhetoric, as well as philosophical aptitude.²¹⁴ It is the disciplines that facilitate discernment of the topics under consideration, whether ethical, physical, or theological in nature.²¹⁵ This

209 *Principles* 1.7–2.3; 3.5–6. Exception make *Principles* 1.5–6 and 2.9, where doctrinal exposition and speculative arguments mingle.

210 *Commentary* 1.60.26–27, 62.4–5. See Pamphilus, *Apology* 3.1–20; 8.1–6; 28.1–22.

211 *Principles* 1.pref.7.100–104. For a similar position, though without reference to the creation, cf. *Principles* 1.pref.3.35–45. Elsewhere, however, Origen seemed adamant that many worlds preceded this one, a view he inferred from Eccl 1:9–10 (*Principles* 3.5.3.57–64). For related examples of cosmological speculation, see *Principles* 2.3.1; 2.3.4; 2.3.5, where he discussed the possibility of successive worlds. The possibility of many worlds apart from the present one also features in Basil, *Hexameron* 1.2.34–38.

212 See Costache, “The Orthodox Doctrine of Creation,” 49–50.

213 *Principles*, pref.1–3. Bostock, “Origen and Pythagoreanism,” 471–475. Crouzel, *Origène*, 84, 86, 222–223. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 224–225. Trigg, *Origen*, 5–7, 62. For Origen’s employment of the natural sciences, see also Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 8.109.96–114.27. But Gregory points out that Origen never separated the intellectual endeavours from the formative purposes of his discourse. Cf. *Address* 11.133.1–135.16.

214 Origen, *Letter to Gregory* 1.10–18 (SC 148). Blowers, *Drama*, 3, 8. Crouzel, *Origène*, 214. Le Boulluec, *Alexandrie antique*, 209–210. Runia, “Origen and Hellenism,” 44. Somos, “An Aristotelian Principle,” 550.

215 *Commentary* 9.154.12–156.31.

multidisciplinary approach does not rob theology of its tasks; in fact, the disciplines are transformed through being used together with theology and within a theological setting.²¹⁶ Either way, diligent disciples are expected to consider “the elements and the fundamentals” of the apostolic preaching by way of “clear and rigorous arguments.”²¹⁷ Logic and dialectic are paramount here. This approach echoes Clement’s conviction that one must progress from basic faith to mature understanding, and that advancement is impossible without dialectical skills and arduous study. More important is that Origen refrains from presenting “worldly science” and his own hypotheses as authoritative teaching.²¹⁸

Fourth, there is the rationale behind his hypotheses. Origen presents cosmological speculations as uncertain, tentative hypotheses, which should be taken prudently. Sometimes he presents multiple solutions from which the reader can choose what seems plausible. The example of his three eschatological possibilities outlined in *Principles* 2.3.7, earlier mentioned, is a perfect illustration.²¹⁹ As we shall see in Chapter Six, Gregory of Nyssa emulated his approach. One might wonder what induced him to propose logical dilemmas, multiple answers, and philosophical hypotheses in the first place. I believe that the answer lies in his teaching activity, which was shaped by ancient, heuristic criteria. As in Clement’s case, his intellectual forays are not intended for lazy students, whom he does not welcome anyway.²²⁰ His hypotheses are aimed at advanced students, who understand the discourse’s heuristic underpinnings.²²¹ Origen is convinced that this strategy is consistent with the way Genesis depicts the making of the world, using images, metaphors, and purposeful inconsistencies.²²² Also, that it matches the protocols of apostolic preaching. He observes that the apostles encouraged the “more diligent” seekers to discern “in the Holy Spirit” the reasons behind their statements.²²³ He trains his disciples accordingly, to discern the truth behind parables and enigmatic statements. They are

216 Crouzel, *Origène*, 212–214.

217 *Principles* 1.pref.10.143–149. Scholars took note of this approach. Daley, *Hope*, 48. Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 101–106. Somos, “An Aristotelian Principle,” 551.

218 See the case discussed in Origen’s *Letter to Gregory* 3.49–54.

219 Cf. *Commentary* 1.60.14–15. Pamphilus (*Apology* 3.21–29) confirms that this was Origen’s usual approach. Crouzel, *Origène*, 217–221. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 267–293. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 122–124. This approach to Scripture and theology became normative for later patristic thinkers. See Costache, “Transdisciplinary Carats,” 154–157.

220 *Commentary* 1.60.8–12.

221 Heine, “Origen’s *Commentary on Genesis*,” 64, 68. Trigg, *Origen*, 38.

222 *Principles* 3.5.1.9–14.

223 *Principles* 1.pref.3.35–45.

not to take things at face value; they have to strive to understand better that they might advance spiritually.²²⁴ *Principles* is illustrative of this heuristic gymnastic.²²⁵

There is no evidence that Origen's detractors noticed his prudent approach or his heuristic strategies aiming at the intellectual and spiritual progress of his students. Nor did they realise the significance of his distinction between certain and uncertain teachings. Instead they preferred to pick out certain passages—overall highly metaphorical in nature—which they presented, shorn of their respective contexts, as so many statements of metaphysical conviction. In the long run, these came to be stigmatised as downright heresies. In turn, as Clement before, distant disciples of Origen such as the Cappadocians and Evagrius deployed identical heuristic devices. I shall return with examples in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

In this light, I repeat my conviction that we must revise our understanding of Origen's discourse on immaterial preexistence, original uniformity, restoration, and eschatological dissolution. We must begin by questioning the assumption that his ideas amount to a metaphysical system, literally speaking. For the sake of consistency, his heuristic commitment to transcend allegorically the "letter" of whatever texts he had to hand—scriptural and otherwise—must be applied to his own literary output. Fortunately, as we saw earlier, scholars already head that way, questioning the metaphysical nature of his stances. These, however, are but cracks in the wall.²²⁶ The next logical step is to assess his discourse in allegorical fashion, which I tentatively propose to do in what follows.

224 For Origen's "zetetic" or heuristic approach aiming at intellectual edification and spiritual transformation, see Gaetano Lettieri, "*Dies una*: L'allegoria di «coelum et terra in Principio» ricapitolazione del sistema mistico-speculativo di Origene," *Adamantius* 23 (2017): 45–84, esp. 46–52. See also, in regards to his *Homilies on the Psalms*, Boulnois, "Chronique," 357–358. This approach became normative in Egypt's monastic movement. See D. Costache, "Elders and Disciples in Egypt's Early Monastic Literature," in *Embracing Life and Gathering Wisdom: Theological, Pastoral and Clinical Insights into Human Flourishing at the End of Life*, ed. Stephen Smith et al., Occasional Series 2 (Macquarie Park: SCD Press, 2020), 275–299, esp. 288–290.

225 Crouzel, *Origène*, 216–217. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 61. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 264–265. Somos, "An Aristotelian Principle," 550.

226 The view still prevails that essentially he affirms a spiritualising cosmological metaphysic under the guise of scriptural interpretation. For recent iterations of this stance, see Fernández, "La fine e la *Genesi*," 167–180 and Peter W. Martens, "Origen's Doctrine of Pre-Existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," *ZAC* 16 (2013): 516–549.

2.2 *Allegorical Discourses and Hallowing Perceptions*

My following proposal draws upon Vlad Niculescu's approach, with a somewhat different focus.²²⁷ From within a non-reductionist framework, Niculescu challenges both the metaphysical understanding of Origen's logocentric worldview and the validity of a spiritualising hermeneutic. Origen, he states, perceives the historical and the textual incarnations of the Logos as messianic, not metaphysical, events. His hermeneutic is embodied and holistic. It communicates a messianic message replete with formative and transformative dimensions; there is nothing idealistic and spiritualist about it. This hermeneutic leaves no room for abstract landscapes and disembodied entities. Niculescu's proposal accords with what increasingly more scholars—we saw above—believe about Origen's approach to scriptural narratives, that pondering them aright is an event of transformation which ultimately leads to the experience of holiness.

It is from this understanding that I take my cue. In short, I propose that we examine Origen's worldview as a metaphorical narrative of the holy life—specifically the experience of contemplative saints—not primarily and literally as a metaphysical system or a cosmological myth. We saw above that his cosmology takes the form of an eschatology which, in turn, betokens the progress of the saints from the earthly life to the divine one.²²⁸ In another text, perhaps the clearest passage of this kind, the usual cosmic reverses and advances become a transparent parable of the holy life. Here it is:

If satiety ever takes hold of one who stands on the highest and perfect step (of the ladder of ascent), I am of the view that he would not be excluded (from the divine presence) and fall immediately. Instead, he of necessity would flow down by degrees and (only) partially. Thus, if sometimes it might happen that a brief failure occurs, he can recover and turn to his senses. He would not rush headlong entirely. (Instead,) he would recall his steps and return to his (previous) condition, being able to retrieve what was lost through negligence.²²⁹

The text discusses the gradual fall of a saint and the possibility of repentance or return. No room for metaphysical events and cosmic catastrophes—or for

²²⁷ Niculescu, "Origen and Logocentrism," 48–53, 56–58.

²²⁸ *Principles* 2.3.7.435–438.

²²⁹ *Principles* 1.3.8.243–248. See also *Principles* 3.5.4.77–80, stating the need to contemplate creation's beginning from the vantage point of the eschatological consummation of all things as experienced by the saints.

the supposed fall from ontological uniformity into diversity. The saint exemplifies what Origen overall presents as the “preexistent” or rather, as Köckert aptly proposed,²³⁰ the preeminent creation. The story of what was lost and will be retrieved is the story of the saints. One gets the same sense when reading, elsewhere, that while all rational beings are one by nature, insofar as they are created,²³¹ their diversity is a fundamental given. It is just that when they are attuned to one another by the acquisition of virtue—or by communing with the divine—their diversity ceases to be problematic. What renders diversity dissonant is rational creation’s centrifugal movement, the Fall, or sinfulness as an ongoing human trend.²³² The restoration of rational creation at the eschaton, accordingly, is not to an initial state of uniformity. Restoration is submission to Christ, the source and centre of all.²³³ It is due to their reference to Christ, in whose image they are made and remade, that the rational beings—or the saints—acquire likeness to God and existential uniformity, likeness. While they remain what they are by nature, the more they advance in godlikeness, or become christomorphic, the more they look alike. Either way, the sense that this eschatological trajectory of the saints is the subtext of Origen’s protological story of cosmic uniformity is inescapable.²³⁴ After all, as Köckert pointed out, for him the saints populate the prehistory of the universe, both in heaven and on earth.²³⁵ I would propose that the saints *are* the metaphorical prehistory of the universe, the “preexistent” world being about advanced minds, not places. To paraphrase Neil Gaiman, Origen’s “preexistent” reality is “made of mind, not world.”²³⁶ We retain that the eschatological destiny of the saints hides behind the veil of a protological cosmic metaphor.

A range of elements seem to corroborate my interpretation. Echoing *Principles* 1.8.1–2, his disciple Gregory suggests that Origen’s stances on preexistence, restoration, and dematerialisation refer to the spiritual journey metaphorically.²³⁷ In the same vein, Torjesen has taken Origen’s myth of the soul’s descent

230 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 265–266.

231 *Principles* 1.8.1.18–2.26.

232 Daniélou, *Origène*, 212–214.

233 *Principles* 1.6.2. See Behr, “Introduction,” lix–lx, lxxviii–ix.

234 Behr (“Introduction,” lxiii–lxiv) points out that Origen infers the beginning from the eschatological glory of the creation.

235 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 257–258, 303–307.

236 Neil Gaiman, *Anansi Boys* (HarperCollins, 2005; ebook), 790.

237 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 6.85–92, offered insights into this strategy through the analogy of Jonathan and David’s relationship, by which he meant his own friendship with Origen, whom he saw as a superior man and a saintly teacher. Gregory’s story includes all the details of Origen’s metaphorical narrative regarding the initial theocentric life of the

and ascent as an indirect way of addressing the spiritual relationship between teacher and disciple.²³⁸ In turn, Blowers showed that for Origen natural contemplation—which is irreducible to the intellectual skills acquired through study—is entirely about the insights of “the spiritually and ascetically diligent.”²³⁹ Lastly, Benjamin Blosser showed that the scope of Origen’s speculations is moral or ethical, not cosmological.²⁴⁰ These elements point to the conclusions that, first, Origen presents reality as the saints perceive it, and that, second, his cosmology amounts to an allegory of the holy, contemplative life. Thus, his cosmology is covert “hagiology,” here understood as a discourse on the life of holiness. It is a metaphorical discourse on saints and their existential experience, which he depicts in the apocalyptic hues of the soul’s—or the mind’s—journey backwards and forwards through the cosmic regions.²⁴¹ Indirectly, a very recent study of scriptural parables and metaphors lends further substance to my proposal by showing how everyday life can be used for conveying cosmological and eschatological messages.²⁴² As steeped in Scripture as he was, Origen must have been aware of this use of images; he reversed it, presenting the holy life through cosmological and eschatological metaphors.

rational creations, their departure from God, and their return to “what is better” under divine guidance.

238 Torjesen, “The Inspired Interpreter,” 294–295.

239 Blowers, *Drama*, 99, 318.

240 Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 123–125, 128, 135, 158. Related, Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 116, pointed out how deeply intertwined were for Origen the nature and destiny of the soul and the cosmos.

241 For the centrality of the soul’s journey in Origen, see Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 111, 122, 128, 135 and Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 212–216. In all likelihood, Origen’s immediate source of inspiration was Philo. See Jack Levison, “Ascent and Inspiration in the Writings of Philo Judaeus,” in *Apocalypticism and Mysticism in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 129–154. See also Gregory E. Sterling, “Dancing with the Stars: The Ascent of the Mind in Philo of Alexandria,” in *Apocalypticism and Mysticism*, 155–166. The apocalyptic topic of soul-travel, or the ascent of the soul/mind, is well researched. Jan N. Bremmer, “Descents to Hell and Ascents to Heaven in Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford University Press, 2014), 340–357. P. Courcelle, “Flügel (Flug) der Seele I,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*, vol. 8, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1972), 29–65. Ioan P. Culianu, *Psychanodia*, vol. 1: *A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance*, EPROER 99 (Leuven: Brill, 1983), 35–42, 48–54.

242 Stephen Llewelyn and Lydia Gore-Jones, “The Conceptual World of a Biblical Metaphor: The Metaphor of Sowing in 4 Ezra and Matthew,” *BI* 28 (2020): 202–227.

Origen is neither original here, nor the last one to think in this manner. Clement's "interiorised apocalypticism" surely paved his way by depicting progress in holiness as ongoing transformation occurring within a cosmic scenery.²⁴³ We shall soon discover, in Chapter Four, that Evagrius picked up Origen's strategy, depicting the holy life in the corresponding terms of a grand cosmic narrative. But this motif, modified, also features in Athanasius' speculations on the paradisiacal experience. Elsewhere I showed that, as in Origen, he addresses the original fellowship of the saints as purified, virtuous, and Christ/Logos-centred people, exhibiting similar behaviours.²⁴⁴ Certain differences are nevertheless apparent. While his depiction of Antony mirrors the ideal on which Origen reflected,²⁴⁵ in *Gentiles* his saints do not bear the physiological marks of sameness. Also, he makes no recourse to the cosmological myth, placing Adam and his saintly company squarely in the scriptural paradise, whence holy Adam fell. But holy Adam and the paradisiacal fellowship of the saints are keenly interested in contemplating God and the cosmos. I return to these matters, partially, in Chapter Four. What matters for now is that, despite the variations, Origen's views and those of his predecessors and heirs converged in seeing the holy life against a cosmic backdrop—sometimes as a cosmic journey. A question remains, however, regarding the reasons behind this approach.

What prompts Origen to adopt protocols of oblique gestures and indirect speech is, I believe, the heuristic method he deploys within the curriculum of ethical formation, intellectual training, natural contemplation, and theology. His disciple Gregory supplies detailed accounts of his complex approach.²⁴⁶ Especially the second stage entails intricate mind games—"in a Socratic manner"²⁴⁷—with which students are to grapple on their own, together, and in the presence of their master.²⁴⁸ It is my view that Origen follows the same peda-

243 For this aspect of Clement's thinking, see Bucur, "Hierarchy," 19–24, 27–42; "The Other Clement of Alexandria: Cosmic Hierarchy and Interiorized Apocalypticism," *VC* 60:3 (2006): 251–268.

244 Costache, "Adam's Holiness," 329–333. Athanasius' *Gentiles* 2–5 actually seems to summarise Origen's views.

245 Costache, "Adam's Holiness," 335–337. Neil et al., *Dreams*, 83–84.

246 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 7.97.33–99.50; 9.115.1–126.58 (ethical formation by way of exhortation to virtue); 7.100.50–106.87 (Socratic, intellectual formation by way of unconventional and rigorous discourse); 8.109.96–114.27 (physics, natural contemplation as a stepping-stone for theology). As for Clement, however, Origen's first two stages—ethics and physics—nurture each other. Gregory shows that one of the functions of natural contemplation is to catalyse the acquisition of virtue. *Address* 9.115.1–6.

247 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 7.97.84.

248 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Address* 7.102–103. The master's input amounts to feeding the disciples in spiritual fashion. Crouzel, *Origène*, 174–176. Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens*,

gogy in his writings, and in *Principles* particularly, and that our reconsideration of his metaphysical and cosmological speculations should start with this point. Central to our effort must be the task of grasping his take on the holy life.

Origen's sense of the "christomorphic" uniformity of the saints must have originated in his witnessing the rise of "holy men" in late antiquity. According to Brown, late ancient "holy men" did look alike, sharing a certain sameness due to their reference to Christ and to the virtues.²⁴⁹ Origen's idea regarding the uniformity of the saints therefore stems from a social phenomenon of his age, when holy men and women could be seen in the flesh. Some of them were known as contemplative. It is the unity and the sameness of the saints which is the content of his parable about creation's primordial uniformity. But Origen has much more to say about the saints and natural contemplation.

Mirroring Clement's holy gnostics and anticipating later views of holiness, the focal point of Origen's natural theory are the saintly contemplatives. Only the saints climb up the high mountains of trinitarian vision.²⁵⁰ Likewise, "the angels and the divine powers" read the "celestial letters" of the cosmos.²⁵¹ If these "divine powers" are the same as Clement's "gods," exemplars of the third kind of people, then once again Origen speaks here about the saints.

This conclusion accords with Crouzel's point that the opacity of cosmic and scriptural symbols dissipates in proportion to the spiritual progress of the contemplative persons.²⁵² Whether interpreting Scripture or contemplating nature, the saints display uncommon perceptive aptitudes—literally, a "divine sense" (*sensum diuinum*).²⁵³ The saints attain this heightened cognitive state by

206–207. Niculescu, "Changing Moods," 192. Torjesen, "The Inspired Interpreter," 294–295. However, with the time passing, the disciples could move beyond needing a guide. See Crouzel, *Origène*, 145.

249 Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar," 5, 7–8, 17–18, 20–21.

250 *Song* 3.214.11–28. Cf. *Principles* 1.3.8.220–242. The mountain was for Origen, as for Clement, the perfect metaphor for the supreme—enoptic or epoptic—vision. See Paul M. Blowers, "Mystics and Mountains: Comparing Origen's Exegesis of the Transfiguration and Gregory of Nyssa's Exposition of the Sinai Theophany," *Phronema* 30:2 (2015): 1–18, esp. 3–8. Cf. Crouzel, *Origène*, 176–177.

251 *Commentary* 7.104.9–13.

252 Crouzel, *Origène*, 148. Other scholars discuss features of the saintly interpreter. Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 89–101, 161–191. Torjesen, "The Inspired Interpreter," 288–290.

253 *Principles* 1.1.9.220–235. See Behr, "Introduction," liii–iv. Crouzel, *Origène*, 178–180. Daniélou, *Origène*, 299–301. Rosa Maria Parrinello, "Da Origene a Simeone il Nuovo Teologo: La Dottrina dei Sensi Spirituali," in *Origeniana Octava*, 2:1123–1130, esp. 1124–1126. Clement mentions something similar in *Stromateis* 2.4.15.3. Later, Athanasius referred to a "divine sense perception." See Neil et al., *Dreams*, 89.

way of arduous purification and “many struggles.”²⁵⁴ Purification opens them to divine grace,²⁵⁵ to the Spirit’s presence,²⁵⁶ enhancing noetic acuity. As such, the senses grasp more than they would do naturally, even the divine presence and the light transcending all things.²⁵⁷ The quest of the saints for knowledge culminates in mystical union with the divine, an asymptotic process of closing in on God yet never fully grasping him.²⁵⁸ Yet the encompassing grasp of reality of the saints takes much more than their efforts, from below; it is a response to Christ’s revelatory initiative. As in Clement, Christ himself—“the truth and the life of all things which exist”²⁵⁹—leads the saints from above to the superior understanding of things.²⁶⁰ It is in Christ’s light that the saints perceive, for example, the place of cosmic diversity within the divine plan for the creation.²⁶¹ It is this profound perception of reality that shapes Origen’s cosmic allegory.

In short, Origen’s metaphysical and cosmological speculations disclose themselves as metaphors of the holy life, welling up from the saints’ profound grasp of reality. In order to decipher these metaphors, Origen’s own thinking must be sifted through the allegorical lens he himself uses in his analysis of things, from written texts to God’s creation. In order to do so readers might need to undergo the transformative process his disciples—indeed the saints whose experiences he ponders—are expected to tackle. And while readers will continue to take Origen’s cosmological myths at face value, this other narrative,

254 *Principles* 1.3.8.238; 2.9.8; 3.6.4 etc. See Dal Covolo, “Sacerdozio dei Fedeli,” 608. Crouzel, *Origène*, 141–142, 177–178. Pazzini, “Aretè e Gnosi,” 278–280.

255 *Principles* 2.3.2.251–252.

256 *Principles* 1.3.5.105–115; 1.3.6; 1.3.7.170–172; 1.3.8.210–212. These passages share in common the idea that while the Father and the Son are present in all things, the Holy Spirit abides only in the saints. Basil, we shall see in Chapter Five, will clarify that the Spirit is present differently in the creation, in order to support its existence, and in the saints, who are worthy of a higher form of divine participation. Origen himself came closer to Basil’s articulation of this topic in *Principles* 3.6.2.

257 Take for example the point that the saints “perceive God, think God, see God, hold God” (*Principles* 3.6.3.51–56). Cf. *Principles* 1.2.7.157–162; 2.9.4.83–96; 3.6.3.51–56. Crouzel, *Origène*, 160–162. Daniélou, *Origène*, 299–301. Trigg, *Origen*, 9–10.

258 Crouzel, *Origène*, 160, 162. Daley, *Hope*, 49–51.

259 *Principles* 1.2.4.60. This is so because Christ is the creator of all things (*Principles* 1.pref.4.56–58). Cf. *Principles* 1.2.7.152, where Christ “enlightens the creation in its entirety.” As we saw in Chapter Two, Ignatius, Clement, and Athanasius were of the same view.

260 *Principles* 1.2.7.157–162. Cf. *Song* 3.218.19–24.

261 *Principles* 2.9.4.83–96. Daniélou (*Origène*, 289–296) discovered exemplifications of this cognitive outcome of virtue in Origen’s homiletic series on Exodus and Numbers. There, he noticed, Origen presents the contemplation of beings together with the principles of providence and incarnation.

regarding the holy life, can no longer be ignored. As we shall see in Chapter Four, the same goes for Evagrius' speculative discourse.

I must now turn to Origen's articulation of natural contemplation through the scriptural lens—a logical outcome of discussing the saints as interpreters and as contemplative persons.

2.3 *Natural Contemplation in the Mirror of Scripture*

As his disciple Gregory informs us, Origen would train his students not only by scriptural exegesis, but also by way of examining the natural world.²⁶² What we know from his own writings, that he adhered to the tradition of natural contemplation, confirms this testimony.

Origen understood physics as a way of retrieving the fullness or “mystery” of reality—as Crouzel put it²⁶³—by tapping its invisible dimensions. He looked at the cosmos as he read any scriptural narratives. Thus his physics follows the trajectory of typological or spiritual exegesis, progressing from visible signifiers to their invisible correspondents.²⁶⁴ It proceeds from what is seen to the unseen, from the corporeal to the incorporeal, from the obvious to the hidden. It is by no means, however, a matter of bypassing the visible. To reach the “unseen and hidden” side of reality is impossible without probing the “visible and manifest” complexity of the universe. The physical cosmos is not meaningless therefore; it is full of “images,” or, in the terms of contemporary chaos theory, patterns, and of mathematical measure theory, fractals.²⁶⁵ Whether we call them images, patterns, or fractals, they invite our attention and, if we respond, they stir us to read the cosmos more deeply.²⁶⁶ As Fyodor Dostoevsky would say, “everything on earth is a riddle” and it is “here [that] the shores converge”; these riddles are where “all contradictions live together” and the patterns cross paths.²⁶⁷ Either way, these meaningful signs—what Origen calls “the likeness and the proportion” of unseen and heavenly things—suffuse the universe, securing a bridge between its visible and invisible

262 Cf. *Address* 8.109.96–114.27. In the same vein, Louth (*Origins*, 59–61) showed that for Origen contemplation of the physical reality was a stage pertaining to the process of spiritual formation.

263 Crouzel, *Origène*, 142. See Harl, “Préexistence,” 240–241.

264 Crouzel, *Origène*, 146–147. Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 153–155.

265 I referred to fractal patterns in Chapter Two. I am grateful to Anna Silvas for pointing me back to this concept.

266 Crouzel, *Origène*, 148.

267 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Everyman's Library 70 (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 107, 108.

dimensions.²⁶⁸ This nexus is the *métier* of natural contemplation. Several paragraphs later, Origen summarises his approach as follows:

From things visible we can know the invisible things, from the corporeal the incorporeal ones, and from the obvious the hidden. Specifically, when we grasp the manner in which the divine wisdom established it, the creation of the world itself teaches us about the invisible things through visible things and images, transporting us from the earthly realms to the celestial ones.²⁶⁹

To perceive the cosmos as an articulate whole, visible and invisible, goes hand in hand with accounting of the divine wisdom which permeates it. As we read elsewhere, while divine wisdom is not easy to grasp,²⁷⁰ we are not left without clues. This isn't a matter of inferring much, yet proving little, to paraphrase Lovecraft again.²⁷¹ Catch as catch can. The clearest proof of wise organisation is the fact that the constituents of the universe are connected or—in the words of contemporary cosmology—finely tuned. A haphazard creation is not the outcome of wisdom. Natural contemplation therefore involves grasping both creation's complexity and its God-given, wisely crafted order. It is from here that the contemplative person begins to apprehend the fullness and the mystery of the cosmos.

Accordingly, the quest for the invisible, the incorporeal, and the hidden does not signify a preference for the ethereal dimensions of reality only. The physical world is not left behind for the sake of its invisible side. By stressing the invisible, in Platonic fashion, Origen means to draw a comprehensive map of the world. That this is so becomes clear in his refutation of materialism, which deprives the cosmos of its noetic side and represents the divine corporeally.²⁷² Otherwise, we already know that he rejects the possibility of a purely immaterial creation.²⁷³ The invisible, the incorporeal, and the hidden are implicitly part of reality's complex whole, but people are oblivious of them. To draw atten-

²⁶⁸ *Song* 3.209.22–210.4; 3.212.12–13. Elsewhere, Origen refers to the soul contemplating the invisible through “certain patterns, marks, and images” present within the visible creation (*Song* 3.220.10–11). It is against this background, undoubtedly, that he affirms the possibility of beholding the unseen by inference from the visible side of reality (*Principles* 1.8.2.36–37).

²⁶⁹ *Song* 3.211.23–212.3.

²⁷⁰ *Song* 3.220.8–9.

²⁷¹ Lovecraft, “Beyond the Wall of Sleep,” 37.

²⁷² *Against Celsus* 1.21.11–15; 3.40.7–8; 3.75.28–32.

²⁷³ *Principles* 2.2.2.154–161; 2.3.6.345–351.

tion to them is to draw attention to cosmic fulness and complexity. As such, to grasp these elusive aspects of reality requires contemplation of the “earthly realms,” not their abandonment for the sake of strange new worlds. That contemplation does not mean bypassing the natural world becomes clear through a string of metaphors to be found elsewhere in Origen’s writings, where we read that the soul which “has the intuition of the world’s ornament” discerns the maker of all through the “beauty of the creations.” As beauty stirs it to marvel and to praise, the soul draws life through the windows of the eyes.²⁷⁴ In the terms of contemporary astrophysics, beauty corresponds to the light that our eyes collect from our surroundings so that, to paraphrase Barnes and Lewis once more, “we form a mental picture of the world” in its complex whole.²⁷⁵ To gaze above and beyond the world, therefore, is not about disregarding its meaningful order and beauty; it’s not about forsaking it. And cosmic beauty rewards us, nurturing the human soul—perhaps as much as introspection does²⁷⁶—because it is pregnant with images and symbols, or meaningful patterns, as we saw earlier.

Origen returns to matters of natural contemplation in the same context, when he speaks of Christ summoning the soul to move away “from carnal things to the spiritual, from visible things to the invisible, and from the Law to the Gospel.”²⁷⁷ The passage mentions again the need to transcend the carnal and the visible in order to reach the spiritual and the invisible. What differs from the previous passage is the last part of the sentence—on the transition from the Law to the Gospel—which clarifies the situation. Moving towards the Gospel does not entail abandoning the Law, but rather, seeking the Law’s “higher” sense, namely, the Gospel, which elucidates the Law’s hidden message. Understood from within its depths, we read elsewhere, Scripture is Gospel in its entirety.²⁷⁸ Origen illustrates this conviction throughout his many writings by interpreting the Old Testament as a *Christian* book.²⁷⁹

274 Song 3.219.24–27. Cf. *Principles* 1.1.6.107–111, where the human mind perceives the transcendent God through contemplating his “rays,” namely, providence and the artistic making of the universe, or “from the beauty of the works and the adornment of his creatures.” See Daley, *Hope*, 57–58.

275 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary’s Handbook*, 42.

276 Gregory Thaumaturgus describes various introspective exercises which Origen proposed to his disciples. See for example *Address* 9.118.12–121.32; 11.137.23–27; 11.140.38–42; 11.142.51–54.

277 Song 3.220.24–25.

278 *On John* 1.6.33–34; 1.6.36. In *The Mystagogy* 6.510–511, Maximus picked this up, reiterating Origen’s stance without alteration.

279 Behr, *Christian Theology*, 1:169–184. Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Ortho-*

The significance of all this for natural contemplation is immense. As with the Law and the Gospel, one moves away from carnal and visible things, not to abandon them, but in order to grasp their fuller sense. Their fuller sense emerges only in the light of spiritual and invisible realities. Moreover, the fuller sense—which corresponds to the divine principles of beings—facilitates the right way of using created things.²⁸⁰ It is clear then that what guides Origen in matters of natural contemplation are his scriptural insights. After all, he emphasises that Scripture and the cosmos communicate “wisdom of a similar sort.”²⁸¹ It should not come as a surprise that for him, the Book of Genesis is the best lens through which to contemplate the cosmos.²⁸² In taking Genesis as his launchpad, he draws upon Clement’s approach.²⁸³ These findings corroborate Blowers’ point that Origen looks at the cosmos through the lens of Scripture.²⁸⁴ Relevant is that the passage examined here confirms what we discovered about the search for invisible, incorporeal, and hidden things.

On this note, I must now turn to one of the most fascinating examples of contemplating the world—or rather its making—through the scriptural lens. This contemplative exercise is found in *Homily*. Initially delivered live, in Caesarea, to regular church audiences, as Origen did not allow for notes to be taken during preaching *Homily* reached us in a thoroughly redrafted form.²⁸⁵ Here, his peering at the cosmos through the Genesis creation narrative becomes an opportunity for mapping the spiritual journey. The methodological complementarity between *Homily* and *Commentary* has been recently established.²⁸⁶ What matters is that Origen’s approach in *Homily* corroborates my proposal that he concealed hagiology as cosmology. Blowers noted the spiritually formative discourse of this writing, but did not analyse it.²⁸⁷ Allan Johnson and Gaetano Lettieri have recently analysed important parts of the text.²⁸⁸

dox Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xiii, 16–21, 39–50. Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9–28.

280 Crouzel, *Origène*, 143.

281 *Song* 3.212.3–5. Cf. *Commentary* 7.104.14–15. See Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 113 and Trigg, *Origen*, 62.

282 *Principles* 3.5.1.9–14.

283 *Stromateis* 4.1.3.2. See Blowers, *Drama*, 37, 317.

284 Blowers, *Drama*, 153–154.

285 Ronald E. Heine, “Introduction” to *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. R.E. Heine, FC 71 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 1–43, esp. 19–22. Heine, “The Alexandrians,” 124–125.

286 Köckert, “Didymus and Origen,” 412. Heine, “Origen’s *Commentary on Genesis*,” 63.

287 Blowers, *Drama*, 108.

288 Allan E. Johnson, “Constructing a Narrative Universe: Origen’s *Homily 1* on Genesis,” *SP* 41

Here then is an overview of *Homily*, indispensable for grasping the subtlety of Origen's approach. The prologue identifies the Logos/Christ as the "beginning" of Gen 1:1, as someone, not as an event. Recent analyses point out that in *Homily* cosmology is framed christologically.²⁸⁹ This is not the only time it takes Christ as a vantage point for considering Genesis.²⁹⁰ Then the prologue summarises the text concerning the "one day" of creation. Taken literally, in this "one day" occurs the naming of light and darkness as day and night. From a spiritual viewpoint, however, the text teaches that while this "one day" is atemporal, the following days illustrate the flow of time.²⁹¹ Origen's analysis of the "days of creation" almost invariably follows this structure. Each section gives one or more scriptural quotation(s), which it interprets literally and spiritually. Literal interpretations are usually short. In some cases, literal interpretations are either absent or reduced to one sentence.²⁹² This confirms the received opinion that—in the form it reached us—*Homily* is not the discourse Origen addressed to general church audiences; it could have been repurposed for his less advanced students as an exercise in the heuristic fashion of interpretation.

Against this backdrop, Origen suggests in *Homily* that two discourses interweave throughout the Genesis narrative of creation: the cosmological or creational, and the anthropological or spiritual. The cosmological discourse is obvious. It refers to the establishment of heaven and earth; the separation of light from darkness; the firmament separating the waters; the earth's rising from the waters; the objects that populate the celestial regions; the living beings that populate the waters and the atmosphere; and the earth populated

(2006): 175–179. This article discusses the semantic, or syntactic, universe of the writing. In turn, Lettieri's "*Dies una*," 45–84 focuses upon "day one" in the Genesis narrative. Corresponding to Blowers' assessment, at 46–47 Lettieri points out that *Homily* aims at spiritual edification, not theological research. In the same vein, Johnson, "Narrative Universe," 176–177. For an older overview of *Homily*, see Lubac, "Introduction," 55–62.

289 Blowers, *Drama*, 141–142. Johnson, "Narrative Universe," 175–176. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 240–247. Lettieri, "*Dies una*," 52–55. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 111–112. Martens, "Pre-Existence," 523–525. Lettieri ("*Dies una*," 45, 58) also found here a summary of Origen's entire worldview, articulated "from a trinitarian and economical, protological and eschatological viewpoint."

290 Later, Christ appears as the spiritual sun, the centre of human experience (*Homily* 5–7). See Johnson, "Narrative Universe," 179. The image might draw on Abraham's third day of travel in Clement, who saw here Christ's resurrection by which the intelligible matrix of the cosmos is revealed.

291 *Homily* 1. This interpretation must be the source of Gregory of Nyssa's theory of creation as a single event and multiple events, discussed in Chapter Six, below. For an interpretation of heaven and earth in *Homily* 1 from the viewpoint of *Principles*, see Lettieri, "*Dies una*," 60–62.

292 *Homily* 8, 12, 17.

with animals and humankind. The second discourse—hidden—focuses on anthropological matters, that is, on the human being's virtuous, spiritual, and divine remaking. Origen's spiritual discourse follows the order of the scriptural narrative closely, but takes it as a cryptic lesson. This lesson focuses on believers having to choose between the spiritual and the material ways of life, or between virtue and sin;²⁹³ practising discernment and pursuing practical and intellectual virtue;²⁹⁴ and finally, participating in the trinitarian sabbath of divine grace in a union matching that between Christ and his church.²⁹⁵ An example: as God placed stars in the firmament believers must identify the stars within their hearts, namely, the virtues.²⁹⁶ I cannot refrain from pointing out at this juncture that Origen's double discourse is far more realistic and appropriate than one might think. Contemporary technology allows us to contemplate images of the human brain and the universe as overlapping structures. More specifically, the neural map of our brain and the cosmic web of galaxies show the same filamentous structure. Of course, Origen could not have been aware of the advancements of modern era, but he devised a comparable model. He read into Genesis a mirroring image of humankind and the world, as microcosm and macrocosm, widespread in late antiquity. In doing so, he arrived at conclusions which largely correspond to our current perception of reality. On this note, I must now return to other matters pertaining to his *Homily*.

Roughly, the anthropological discourse mirrors the familiar threefold schema of the spiritual journey, advancing from ethics to physics to enoptics, or divine vision.²⁹⁷ This schema corresponds to reading Scripture bodily, psychically, and spiritually. These outlines overlap perfectly. The bodily reading matches ethics, the psychic one contemplation, and the spiritual one enoptics. Against this backdrop, in Origen's spiritual interpretation of the Genesis narrative, the first three days denote the acquisition of practical virtue and, hermeneutically, Scripture's bodily meaning; the next three days denote advancement in contemplation, corresponding to Scripture's psychical meaning; finally, the seventh day—divine union—corresponds to the spiritual meaning. In Chapter Four I shall discuss a very similar approach in Evagrius' *Gnostic 18*.

293 *Homily 2–4*.

294 *Homily 5–13*.

295 *Homily 14–17*.

296 *Homily 7*.

297 Daniélou (*Origène*, 289–296) discussed this schema in relation to other works, as unfolding from one's rediscovery of the self as being in God's image to purification and virtue to natural contemplation to divine gnosis.

It is noteworthy that by organising the material in this fashion Origen does not disregard the scriptural text, the “letter,” and its order. Believers who turn away from evil parallel God’s activity of differentiating the elements; their advancement in virtue and contemplation matches God’s work of populating the cosmic regions with beings; their union with God corresponds to the divine sabbath in the world.²⁹⁸ Thus, Origen shows that on a deeper level the scriptural narrative of cosmogony encodes a profound spiritual anthropology—and we already know that human transformation is his main interest. This way of looking at Genesis must be the source of Origen’s encoding of spiritual anthropology in the (or as a) cosmological story.

Lettieri discerned pointers to spiritual anthropology very early on within *Homily*, for example where the heavens signify the human *nous* (or mind), or “the spiritual human being.”²⁹⁹ On this ground and related occurrences, he concluded that the cosmology of *Homily* is “in fact anthropology, ontology of the subject, physics of the intellectual and free subject, within which the sky and the earth are allegories of the human being’s parts.”³⁰⁰ His view of *Homily* corroborates my observations on Origen’s cosmological encoding of hagiology in *Principles*, especially since it is *Principles* that conditions his understanding of *Homily*. That said, while I concur with Lettieri’s assessment that *Homily* focuses on human transformation, I would not reduce its message to the spiritual discourse only. Yes, we know that spiritual anthropology is central here—and transparently so. But Origen’s literal interpretations—albeit quantitatively modest compared to the spiritual ones—attest to the cosmological dimension as much as they do to the narrative’s explicated meaning.

Origen’s approach in *Homily* is complex and multilayered. Through such a wide and deep lens, the story of creation proves to be more than first meets the eye. The closest physical analogy would be the light spectrum, which extends far beyond what the human sight can grasp. Similarly, while the scriptural narrative outlines the cosmic order, on a certain level, surreptitiously, it speaks of humankind’s spiritual remaking. Accordingly, Origen highlights the invisible side of the textual spectrum—its message pertaining to spiritual anthropology—without sacrificing attention to the literal and the cosmological. Origen’s hermeneutical presuppositions earlier discussed—regarding the Old Testament and the Gospel, together with the visible and the invisible

298 See more examples in Johnson, “Narrative Universe,” 178–179.

299 Lettieri, “*Dies una*,” 55, 60. Later, at 63–66, he proposed that in *Homily* the discourse on the church as fellowship of the saints complements Origen’s spiritual anthropology. Cf. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 266–267, 306–307.

300 Lettieri, “*Dies una*,” 66; cf. 71–72.

aspects of the world—apply to *Homily* too, at least when one considers it in its entirety. Lettieri missed the importance of these presuppositions, possibly because he interpreted “day one” primarily from the viewpoint of *Principles*.³⁰¹ And, we saw above, the cosmology of *Principles* is not what one might take it to be.

Before we go on, I must briefly discuss how *Homily* addresses natural contemplation. It is noteworthy that it does not mention these terms directly. Whatever it says, especially about the earthly environment, is by summarising Gen 1 and parallels. As such, it echoes Clement’s method of considering the cosmos through the scriptural lens, but with a difference. Clement strongly affirmed the necessity of scientific exploration—as we noted above, and as Origen himself did elsewhere—but *Homily* does not follow this course.³⁰² It is true that its “literal” parts refer to the cosmos and its inhabitants, but they do so by pondering what Scripture has to say about them. At face value, therefore, *Homily* does not offer a rigorous method of contemplating the world in itself. However, it depicts the universe as meaningful, full of lessons for believers. Through the scriptural lens diligent believers—and one might legitimately assume that Origen also intends his students—discover in the cosmic order a map which shows what they are supposed to become, and how to do so. In the terms he uses in *Principles*, they discover the world as a school for souls³⁰³ and a ground where salvation is obtained.³⁰⁴ *Homily* delivers the same wisdom in its own way. As Johnson pointed out, it presents “the things of earthly creation as stages on the way of a heavenly journey.”³⁰⁵ This amounts to more than to learn from the cosmic school about ourselves. The world invites us to walk through it on the way to perfection, following the roadmap the spiritual meaning of Genesis draws for us.

Origen’s scriptural insight into cosmic order echoes the textual universe of Irenaeus. It also anticipates the method that led Athanasius to affirm the “syn-

301 Lettieri, “*Dies una*,” 79–81.

302 From this viewpoint, his approach in *Homily* corresponds to his representation of the celestial bodies in *Principles* 1.7.2–5, where the entire argument is scripturally anchored (except for a few lines, 1.7.3.65–70, where one discerns hints of scientific information regarding the different movement of the stars and of the planets). For a similar stance, see *Commentary* 7.80.12–21.

303 *Principles* 2.11.6; 3.5.4.95–96; 3.5.8.161–163; 3.6.8.189–196. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 104–105. Daley, *Hope*, 57–58. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 81. Scott, *Journey Back to God*, 74, 93, 100, 161, 165. Trigg, *Origen*, 29–30. The cosmic school corresponds to the scriptural one. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 307. Niculescu, “Changing Moods,” 186.

304 Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 263. Jacobsen, “Origen on the Human Body,” 653–654.

305 Johnson, “Narrative Universe,” 178.

tactic” nature of the world. As Johnson discovered, his “narrative universe” accommodates many stories of human and cosmic becoming,³⁰⁶ all pointing to creation’s transformation—in parts and as a whole—into what the creator designed it to be. In *Homily*, it is upon these stories that Origen’s natural contemplation focuses. It is these stories that he invites his students—as saintly interpreters—to consider. He might not be as intensely interested in the cosmos as Clement before him, but his scriptural lens is equally important for articulating the early Christian worldview.

In the last leg of my analysis, I sketch the contours of Origen’s cosmos. What does he have to say about the world as such?

2.4 *The Shape of the World*

Origen’s universe is far from simple. As Daniélou characterised it, it is *une vision totale du monde*, or a comprehensive view of reality.³⁰⁷ We saw above that certain scholars describe it as a Platonic worldview, vertically structured. As such, his cosmos would pour downwards, from immateriality to materiality, and then turn upwards again, from materiality to immateriality. It is true that vertical schemas can be discerned everywhere in his writings, but they neither exhaust the shape of his universe nor circumvent his opposition to an immaterial creation. As a rule, such vertical schemas operate within exegetical contexts where the sacred texts themselves demand advancement to higher meanings—with *Homily* being a perfect illustration of this approach—but not to describe a supposed displacement of materiality with immateriality. As contemporary scholars have discovered, Origen’s interests are in hermeneutics and exegesis, not metaphysics. His vertical models therefore are hermeneutical, not cosmological or ontological. The analogy of the two Testaments, earlier discussed, is illuminating in this regard. As the Old Testament is not abolished by the revelation of its higher meaning in the New Testament, so to highlight the loftier regions of the universe is not to affirm its dematerialisation. After all, the visible signs, images, and patterns within it internally connect with their invisible correspondents on a continuous basis. An immaterial world would also contradict Origen’s twofold anthropology. While the outer person and the inner person may be differentiated, yet they remain inseparable; the human being is, consequently, irreducible to either of its two sides.³⁰⁸ As the human being, so the universe. We shall soon discover, indeed, that the human being has a kinship to the entire visible and invisible universe.

306 Johnson, “Narrative Universe,” 179–180.

307 Daniélou, *Origène*, 8. Daniélou surveyed Origen’s cosmological thinking at 207–217.

308 *Song* prol.8–12.

As Köckert explained, Origen's vertical schemas disclose the existence of two different sides of reality, inner and outer, visible and invisible.³⁰⁹ These schemas are not about obliterating one side in order to affirm the other. Accordingly, after explaining the meaning of the word "cosmos" as both world and ornament, or beauty, Origen shows that it applies to the earth as much as to the universe in its entirety—heaven and earth, visible and invisible, material and spiritual, transitory and perennial.³¹⁰ The universe consists of a series of spheres, planetary and fixed, including the outermost one, which the saints inhabit.³¹¹ It is never an incorporeal reality, the outcome of a vertical movement away from the density of matter.

On closer inspection, Origen's universe resembles our own expansive universe, which follows the arrow of time. One would say, a horizontal universe—a contingent cosmos of movement and change, of becoming and transformation, heading towards its eschatological *telos*.³¹² Anticipating Maximus' famous triadic outline of the creation evolving from the beginning through the middle towards the final consummation,³¹³ Origen outlines the cosmic trajectory as follows:

As for the beginning (*initium*) and the end of time, as well as for the middle, it is reasonably said that they mean the beginning (*initium*) of this visible world ... the middle being its temporal span, while the end is that which he hope for, namely, the transformation of heaven and earth. Concerning what is hidden, for he or she who understands—whom God taught wisdom—true knowledge of the beginning (*initium*) refers to that which neither the times nor the ages can grasp. Furthermore, the middle truly is the present state of things, while the end truly refers to future

309 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 261–262.

310 *Principles* 2.3.6.326–365. *Commentary* 7.104.9–13. For an analysis of the cosmos as heaven and earth in Origen's works, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 247–267.

311 *Principles* 2.3.6.366–408. Cf. *Principles* 2.9.3.43–45, where the cosmos includes all things above the heavens, in the heavens, upon the earth, and in the lower regions—in short, all the places together with their inhabitants. For Origen's cartography of the heavens, see Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 119–120.

312 Daniélou, *Origène*, 298. Johnson, "Narrative Universe," 176–177. For example, insofar as they are created the celestial bodies ever move and change; they are therefore corruptible (*Principles* 1.pref.7.100–102; 1.7.2; 1.7.5). After all, the creation in its entirety "undergoes all possible transformations," "changes," and "alterations" (*Principles* 2.1.4.73–76; *Song* 3.210.17–20). As such, the world, having a temporal beginning, must have an end (*Principles* 3.5.1–8).

313 See Costache, "Being," 72–84, and the references therein.

things, namely, the perfection and fulfilment of the universe. All these can be inferred and gathered from things visible.³¹⁴

This passage frames cosmic existence—literally, the middle—between its ineffable origin and the expected consummation of all things. While the last sentence corroborates what we discovered in several places already—cosmic meaningfulness—more important here is the idea of a melioristic universe. Despite its humble beginning, due to its ungraspable origin the universe moves towards improvement and fulfilment. No room for either extinction or immateriality. A contrast between origin and beginning seems to be needed here, although Rufinus uses *initium* in all cases. Related passages suggest the usefulness of such a distinction. Elsewhere we learn that the universe has its origin in the ineffable blueprint located within the mind of the Logos, which prescribes the course of its unfolding (middle) and finality (end).³¹⁵ Similarly, *Song* speaks of the changes which occur in the middle as conditioned by “older and eternal years,”³¹⁶ namely, the preexistent blueprint. Conversely, the beginning is the leap into existence of the universe out of nothing.³¹⁷ As Behr and Köckert pointed out, Origen was aware of the difference between created and uncreated, thus of the cosmic upsurge from nothingness.³¹⁸ However, as we read elsewhere, the beginning itself is not simple, referring to successive divine actions such as creation, making, and moulding.³¹⁹ As for the middle, it is the temporal

314 *Song* 3.210.8–17.

315 The blueprint preexists within God's Wisdom, encoding “the beginning and the reasons and the species of the creation in its entirety” (*Principles* 1.2.2.38–45). Wisdom, or the blueprint, is the origin or the cause of all things. Cf. *Principles* 1.2.3.46–51, where the Logos discloses the content of divine Wisdom in regard to the creation. In *Commentary* 3.64.14–16, instead of the blueprint what precedes the creation is God's will. See Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 298–303.

316 *Song* 3.210.20–22.

317 *Principles* 3.5.1.9–14.

318 A clear affirming of creation out of nothing is found in *Principles* 1.pref.4.47–50 (“there is one God, who created and connected the whole, and who, being God, when nothing existed (*cum nihil esset*), made the universe from the first creation and foundation of the world”). Cf. *Principles* 1.3.3.42–47; 2.1.4.90–118; 2.1.5; *Commentary* 3.64.1–5 (in fact the entire third fragment, 62–64). Its creation is what makes the universe comprehensible to us, whereas God, not having beginning, escapes our grasp (*Principles* 3.5.2). See Behr, “Introduction,” xlvii, liii and Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 293–298, 309–310. In turn, Florovsky believed that Origen was unable to draw a line between the created and the uncreated. See his *Aspects of Church History*, 42–47; *Creation and Redemption*, Collected Works 3 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), 52–54. Also, Fernández, “La fine e la *Genesis*,” 171–173.

319 *On John* 20.182. For a brief analysis, see Behr, “Introduction,” lxi–ii.

journey of the universe towards the perfection which it never possessed, but for which it was created in the first place.³²⁰ Origen adopts a similar position elsewhere, in a passage where he describes divine providence imbuing the creation's beginning, middle, and end.³²¹ I take this opportunity to note that the passages referred just above add to the proofs I reviewed in the foregoing, contradicting the view that Origen believed in the immaterial perfection of the universe before its material beginning.³²²

When the two models, vertical and horizontal, combine, what results is a cruciform representation of reality. Given the centrality of Christ—the Logos incarnate and crucified—in Origen's worldview, the cruciform symbolic here should not come as a surprise. All things in their widest extension correspond to the centre of all things. This understanding did not escape Crouzel's notice.³²³ But, again, while the cruciform model confirms the complexity of Origen's worldview, irreducible to the vertical schema, this is not the only way of looking at his cosmos.

Origen's is also an anthropic universe. For him, humankind is coessential with the earth and its inhabitants, as well as with the spiritual heavens and the celestial bodies.³²⁴ The whole of the creation therefore is homogenous; the

320 The universal changeability, pertaining to both the visible and the invisible sides of the creation, appears in *Song* 3.210.17–20 and *Principles* 3.6.7. Insofar as created, the “rational natures” of the original creation were “necessarily changeable and mutable” (*Principles* 2.9.2.23–25). See Blosser, *Like the Angels*, 46. Daley, *Hope*, 53. Daniélou, *Origène*, 212. The reference to the saints moving towards perfection, from image to likeness, confirms this point. Cf. *Principles* 2.3.7.435–438; 3.6.1.13–19; 3.6.6. For notes on this trajectory, see Crouzel, *Origène*, 130–137, 161–162.

321 *Principles* 2.1–3 (for a summary of this stance, see 2.1.1.3–7).

322 The pretext of this view is the cosmological myth at *Principles* 2.9.1–2.9.2, the scholars who take it at face value possibly missing the caveat which I mentioned above, regarding *Principles* 2.9.2.23–25. Several scholars support the notion of perfect origins. Bostock, “Origen and Pythagoreanism,” 471. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 104–105. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 64–65. Trigg, *Origen*, 26–29. Recently, Behr (“Introduction,” lvi) pointed out that the supposed perfection of the original creation actually refers to the preexistence of beings as patterns within the mind of God's Wisdom. Thus, creation is perfect and eternal in a “prefigurative sense.” In the same vein, Pazzini (“Aretè e Gnosi,” 276–278) showed that moral perfection is acquired personally and in time; it is not an antecedent reality. Cf. Daniélou, *Origène*, 211; Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens*, 209–212, 214–215, 247–263; “Préexistence,” 250.

323 Crouzel, *Origène*, 143–144.

324 *Homily* 12 highlights that the verb “made” appears in Gen 1 only in regard to heaven, celestial bodies, and humankind, denoting that these beings are profoundly related, through an infrastructure secured by the divine activity. A direct reference to the body and the cosmos as ontologically consistent is found in *Principles* 2.3.2.269–271. What I designate as anthropic discourse has not escaped scholars. Blowers, *Drama*, 318. Daniélou, *Origène*, 207–208. Johnson, “Narrative Universe,” 177. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 264.

anthropic principle confirms this fact. It is for this reason that humankind's ultimate destiny—transfiguration—corresponds to and heralds what the universe will experience eschatologically.³²⁵ Maximus echoes this idea, too.³²⁶ The link between human nature and cosmic nature, furthermore, makes it possible for human beings to affect the world. The universe shares in our tragedies and in our hopes.³²⁷ As we already know, *Diognetus* anticipates this perception. The homogeneity of the human and cosmic creation corroborates Origen's rejection of a purely immaterial universe. Cosmic harmony and the homogeneity of all things visible and invisible exclude the possibility of ontological differences within the creation. Related, Behr showed that Origen's worldview depicts reality as visible and invisible, therefore scripturally, not metaphysically, as an amass of ontologically different layers.³²⁸ As the human being is both visible and invisible, so too is the universe.

Homogeneity does not mean lack of diversity. On purpose, God created all things by species, number, and order.³²⁹ While they are one creation, and thus homogenous, the visible and the invisible exist in different modes. As Origen says of the Song of Songs' author,

he knows the substance of the world (*substantiam mundi*), and not only the visible and corporeal aspect, which is obvious, but also the incorporeal and invisible one, which is hidden. He also knows the elements of the world (*elementa mundi*), not only those which are seen, but the unseen too, together with the characteristics of both.³³⁰

This brief reference to the “substance of the world” (*substantia mundi*) shared by the creation's visible and invisible dimensions, and to the fundamental elements (*elementa mundi*) pertaining to each, is as physical as it can be. It simultaneously affirms creation's infrastructural homogeneity and superstructural

325 *Principles* 3.6.4–5. See Daley, *Hope*, 48.

326 *The Mystagogy* 7.558–575.

327 *Principles* 2.1.3.46–47; 2.9.5.144–151.

328 Origen explicitly rejects the idea of an ontologically discontinuous creation, which would require the existence of multiple deities (*Principles* 1.8.2). See Behr, “Introduction,” xlii–xlv.

329 *Principles* 1.7.1.8–22; 2.1.1.8–13; 2.2.2.154–161. The mystery of cosmic diversity appears in *Principles* 2.9.4.83–96.

330 *Song* 3.210.4–8. Elsewhere Origen speaks of matter and qualities (*Principles* 2.1.4.82–89). This discussion anticipates Gregory of Nyssa's speculations addressed in Chapter Six. For an overview of Origen's two substances and the antecedents of his approach, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 249–256, 309–310.

diversity. It also documents Origen's awareness of the microphysics available to him, using the terms of substances and elements.³³¹ As we read several lines later, the different substances and elements pertaining to the visible and the invisible do not efface creation's overall imperfection, corruptibility, and changeability.³³² The two passages seem to anticipate, respectively, quantum physics, with its perspective of the shared infrastructure of all things, and the relativistic universe of movement and change. Either way, this naturalist representation of the world is at variance with Origen's supposed spiritualism. We shall soon see that Athanasius similarly affirmed the natural instability of the world. But what matters for now is that Origen's worldview affirms cosmic multiplicity just as much as homogeneity, which are never separate.³³³ The cosmos is complex.

These are not the only places where he affirms cosmic complexity. Elsewhere, in *Principles*, we read that the world is a body composed of many parts, all of which are held together by God's power and reason as though by a soul.³³⁴ But their infrastructural unity does not mean uniformity. Multiplicity will still exist—we read yet elsewhere—in the eschatological condition which the current state of the universe prefigures.³³⁵ The statements reviewed here complement each other in regard to the internal interconnectedness of the universe. Specifically, *Song* refers to the natural infrastructure of the cosmos, whereas *Principles* to God's permeating activity.

As with other early Christian authors whose thought I engage in this book (see Chapters Five and Six), Origen does not perceive these different explanations as problematic. The multilayered and diverse cosmos tends towards unity both naturally and supernaturally, that is, synergistically. It goes the same for the invisible, or the spiritual dimension of the world, and for the visible, or its material dimension. As we read within the same context in *Principles*—in a passage which echoes and develops Clement's view of the pacified saints who can grasp cosmic unity—rational beings work “to complete the fullness and perfection of one world” in that “the very variety of minds tends to one

331 The same goes for his repeated reference to the earth as spheric (*Principles* 2.3.6.333,336). Scholars noticed Origen's interest in physics, taken as a starting point for contemplation. Crouzel, *Origène*, 143. Köckert, “Didymus and Origen,” 415. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 114–115, 117–119.

332 *Song* 3.210.17–20. *Principles* 3.6.5.106–121.

333 Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens*, 240–243. Scott, *The Life of the Stars*, 117.

334 *Principles* 2.1.3.47–50,57–58. For other descriptions of cosmic diversity, see *Principles* 2.1.1.8–13; 2.9.3. A distinct echo of this view can be found in Maximus (*The Mystagogy* 7.549–558).

335 *Principles* 2.1.3.67–68.

goal, perfection.”³³⁶ That they do of their own accord, as well as summoned by God’s wise and ineffable activity, which restores and energises their natural tendency.³³⁷ By tuning unto their natural aptitudes—themselves divine gifts—God safeguards their freedom and facilitates their harmonious cooperation. But the gentle nudges by which God leads the spiritual beings towards unity signify a more profound activity, running in the background of the universe. It is divine providence, which operates on a cosmic scale:

One power which binds together and surrounds the diversity of the whole world, aiming to bring diversity to the movement of one activity, lest the world’s immense work be dismantled by the disagreements of the souls.³³⁸

Divine providence, here, amounts to a unifying force which prevents the cosmos from being affected by the dissensions between the rational beings.³³⁹ The importance of this sentence is great. First, it points out the divine activity unfolding in the infrastructure of the universe, which secures cosmic coherence. Second, cosmic diversity does not disappear, but the divine input attunes the particular aptitudes and movements of the created beings to each other, so that all things work together with all things, as one creation; Irenaeus’ and Clement’s lyre analogies seem to be present in the subtext. Third, the rational or spiritual beings—the souls, the saints—make an impact upon the cosmic matrix—the anthropic principle again—their disagreements registering as forces which undermine the unity of the world.³⁴⁰ Fourth, and in the light of the previous lines, by restoring and reorienting the movement of the spiritual beings, divine providence sustains creation’s natural movement. It follows that providence is a complex framework wherein natural movement, freedom, and divine activity converge, or synergise, for the purposes of maintaining creation on its way towards perfection. Marguerite Harl was right to point

336 *Principles* 2.1.2.30–32.

337 *Principles* 2.1.2.26–28. For the intersection of divine and natural factors within the creation, as natural contemplation grasps them, see Daniélou, *Origène*, 294–295.

338 *Principles* 2.1.2.32–34.

339 This is an unusual way of showcasing providence. For the broader views of Origen on providence, always polemically articulated, see Behr, “Introduction,” xxxvii–viii; Silke-Petra Began, “Celsus the Epicurean? The Interpretation of an Argument in Origen, *Contra Celsum*,” *HTR* 94:2 (2001): 181–206, esp. 193–197; Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 52–53, 55–57; Scott, *Journey Back to God*, 2–3, 21–23, 37–39, 60–61.

340 The fall is proof of this impact. Cf. *Principles* 2.1.1.14–25.

out that Origen's holistic physics refers to the threefold relationship between God, rational creations, and the cosmos.³⁴¹

Even this brief survey of Origen's universe emphasises the impossibility of reducing his worldview to the vertical schema alone, or, worse, of assessing it in terms of a metaphysical spiritualism. Origen's universe is complex and multilayered. Differences do not mean separations. Ontological homogeneity is what binds all things together, naturally, while cosmic order receives a continuous divine input in the form of providence, supernaturally. Thus perceived, the world illustrates within itself all that pertains to the human being, who is equally complex. No wonder Origen could not conceive of a different eschatological destiny of the universe and of humankind. With or without my earlier suggestion that his cosmological speculations are a masked hagiology, humankind's final glory will be shared by the whole of the creation. No room is left, therefore, for an immaterial world in which literally angelic humans will dissolve into the ethereal horizons of the spirit.

Last, but not least, in the above we noticed clear signs of a complex method, where scriptural insights, theological views, and scientific information converge into the articulation of a nuanced representation of reality. This interdisciplinary method gives us important hints as to the steps Origen's students were to take in order to attain his understanding of things. Contemporary scholars must take the same steps.

3 Conclusions

With Clement and Origen, early Christian thought reached a level of sophistication unprecedented in the tradition, with the notable exception of their contemporary, Irenaeus. What they endeavoured to achieve, paraphrasing Crouzel's observation,³⁴² is the "conversion of human intelligence" so that it can deploy its tools for communicating faith. A wonderful exchange occurred as a result of their efforts. Through converting intelligence and culture, they created an important instrument for Christian mission, which facilitated their successful engagement of trends and ideas. The same instrument led them to a deeper understanding of their own faith. Regardless of what subsequent generations had to say about their endeavours, they inaugurated a Christian way of thinking without which later theology would have been impossible.

341 Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens*, 234–238.

342 Crouzel, *Origène*, 346.

More relevant to my purposes here, Clement and Origen were pioneers in terms of positioning the Christian worldview at the crossroads of scriptural wisdom, theological criteria, philosophical speculation, and scientific information. While the two pursued distinct avenues, both were remarkably accomplished in this area. They shaped natural contemplation into an interdisciplinary undertaking. Together with natural intelligence and diligent study, however, contemplative undertakings require a willingness to implement change, to improve personally. This last part is consistent with their Christian conviction that believers are called to renewal and transformation, and with a classical pedagogy which demands that people better themselves. Accordingly, the contemplative person becomes the centre of natural contemplation. What must have given to both authors a further impulse to focus upon the virtuous person—the saint—is another contextual factor, the rise of the “holy man” during their own time.

As a result, their approach to natural contemplation is not only methodological, it is also—if not more so—personal in its interests. The contemplation of the natural world is not so much about the rigours of pursuing an objective approach to things. It is about bridging the subject, or the contemplative person, and the object, or reality, the viewer and the viewed; it is about bringing them to harmony. The perfect illustration of this approach is Origen's double map, the explicit one of the universe and the implicit one of the human being, sketched in interpreting the Genesis creation narrative. But the perfect embodiment of this method undoubtedly remains Clement's “holy gnostic,” whose achievement amounts to bridging the self and the whole within one experience.

I must now turn to similar developments in Athanasius and Evagrius. My conclusions to Chapter Four will have an important bearing on our understanding of what I discussed here.

Contemplation of the Natural World: The Fourth Century

Athanasius of Alexandria and Evagrius of Pontus, whose works I explore in what follows, found inspiration in the trailblazing contributions of Clement and Origen. What they say about natural contemplation therefore has a familiar ring. However, there is nothing dull about their input. Given the new context within which they wrote—the rise of Egyptian monasticism—their works make for interesting reading. Indeed, their views are shaped by the ascetic trends of the time. Athanasius had a great interest in monastic life, both for personal and for pastoral reasons. No wonder the Egyptian monastic milieu provided him with some of his characteristic ideas. In turn, Evagrius, himself a monk, blended the Christian intellectual tradition and the desert experience. Both revered Antony, the emblematic figure of fourth-century monasticism, whom they portrayed as a master of natural contemplation. Antony's perception of the cosmos as “another scripture” must have confirmed their enthusiasm for Clement and Origen's contributions in this area. Moreover, both iterated Clement and Origen's stances on natural contemplation in order to articulate the exploits of contemporary ascetics in acceptable cultural forms. Both, finally, refined further the view, discussed in Chapter Three, that the virtue of the contemplative person guarantees success in the contemplation of the natural world. With them, therefore, the holiness of the person is integral to the approach advocated. This concern becomes so important for Evagrius, that he reckons natural contemplation central to the experience of holiness and a significant signpost for the monastic journey. It is from this point that I surmise my reconstruction of Evagrius' worldview—in the second half of this chapter—by which I challenge the established view regarding his vested interest in metaphysics. But first, I turn to Athanasius, the importance of whose contributions Evagrius himself acknowledged.

1 Athanasius

We already know from Chapter Two that in matters cosmological Athanasius drew on the wisdom of his traditional predecessors.¹ In what follows we shall discover further proofs of this same approach in regard to natural contemplation. These instances paint a different portrait of the man, who is currently seen as opposing contemplative exercises. Some scholars have believed that his interest in creation *ex nihilo* and in the ascetic management of the body prevented him from appreciating philosophical exercises of this kind.² Their data are undoubtedly correct, but the evidence discussed below raises question marks about the conclusion. It will soon become obvious that Athanasius' prudence did not lead him to dismiss contemplation.

As Louth demonstrated, in his early writings such as *Gentiles*, although not in *Incarnation*, Athanasius depended on Origen's teachings.³ Elsewhere I have shown that even later works such as *Life* replay the views of Origen, either directly or by way of considering Antony's wisdom.⁴ In another study, furthermore, I proposed that certain particularities of his discourse actually evoke the earlier figure of Clement's "holy gnostic," especially the ascetic and contempla-

1 For this part of the chapter, I borrow material from three earlier contributions, "Adam's Holiness," "Christian Gnosis," and "Logos și creație," which I supplement with new insights and recent bibliography.

2 David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, OECs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 145–146, 160, 198. Andrew Louth, "Later theologians of the Greek east," in *The Early Christian World* (2017), 587–605, esp. 591; *Origins*, 73–74, 76, 192. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 132. Perhaps because of not using the term "philosophical" frequently, Athanasius' name does not feature in the list of Hadot (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 128–129) of early Christian theologians interested in the philosophical life. That said, Hadot (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 131, 133, 135, 139) identified Athanasian Antony as a philosophical figure. If Athanasian Antony was a genuine philosopher, Athanasius' philosophical leanings cannot be ignored.

3 Louth, *Origins*, 75–76. Cf. Georges Florovsky, *Aspects of Church History*, Collected Works 4 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), 54 and Prinzivalli, *Magister Ecclesiae*, 197–200.

4 See Neil et al., *Dreams*, 87–88, 90, 96, 114. In the same vein, Girardi, "Origene," 1081–1083. For the direct link between Athanasius and Antony, see Charles Kannengiesser, "Antony, Athanasius, Evagrius: The Egyptian Fate of Origenism," *CCR* 16:1 (1995): 3–8, esp. 6–7. For the Origenian outlook of Antony's letters, see Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition, and the Making of a Saint*, SAC (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 60–61, 66–67. See also Augustine Casiday, "'All Are from One': On St. Antony the Great's Protology," *StM* 44:2 (2002): 207–227, esp. 211–220. Together with demonstrating the impact of Origen's thought upon Athanasius' earlier and later works, Kannengiesser cautioned against appraising Antony as Origenist; for him, Antony drew on ancient Egyptian layers of the tradition, which informed the approach of Origen only partially. See Kannengiesser, "Origen's Doctrine," 889, 896–899.

tive outlines of that figure.⁵ What matters is that he continued Clement and Origen's tradition, which, as I discussed yet elsewhere, provided him with fitting intellectual tools for articulating the ascetic experience of Antony and his monastic entourage.⁶ His profound familiarity with Egypt's monastic milieu is well documented,⁷ and there is ample evidence that in certain matters he borrowed the views of Antony and other representatives of desert spirituality.⁸ His contemporaries were aware of his vital interest in the contemplative life.⁹ Indeed, together with drawing on earlier traditions, much of his discourse on gnosis and contemplation draws on the desert experience. His relevant contributions cannot be underestimated. It seems to me that Evagrius' articulation of the desert experience in Alexandrian terms—discussed in the second half of this chapter—received some impetus from the contributions of Athanasius.

After a brief discussion of his views of desert ascetics as embodying the “holy gnostic,” I consider elements of natural contemplation in his writings.

1.1 *Ascetic Life and Natural Contemplation*

Adam and Antony serve as examples for the Athanasian iteration of Origen's saintly person or what Clement called the “holy gnostic.” These linked figures illumine Athanasius' understanding of the contemplative ascetic. Therefore, grasping the significance of these figures will be instrumental towards understanding his view of natural contemplation.

Louth pointed out that both Athanasius and his hero, Antony, seem very little concerned with contemplation.¹⁰ But we briefly saw in Chapter Two that the portrait of Athanasian Antony is still of a philosopher.¹¹ Antony under-

5 Costache, “Christian Gnosis,” 261–262. Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 17–56. Also in the footsteps of Clement, he admired the contemplative and prayerful achievements of ascetic women. David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*, CTC (Oxford University Press, 2012), 112–116. Neil et al., *Dreams*, 88, 109.

6 Costache, “Adam's Holiness,” 325–339. There is indication that Athanasian Antony resembles the traits of Origen's martyr depicted as an ascetic. See Kránitz, “Monachesimo Primitivo,” 1012–1014. Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 198, 202–244; Neil et al., *Dreams*, 83–84, 86, 90.

7 Brakke, *Athanasius*, 1–2 etc (the entire work documents this connection). Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 11, 15, 105, 111–119. Neil et al., *Dreams*, 72, 80, 112. Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, MT (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 65–67.

8 Neil et al., *Dreams*, 72, 86–93. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 60, 62–64, 132–144.

9 Brakke, *Athanasius*, 14, 82. Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 58, 66.

10 Louth, *Origins*, 76.

11 Costache, “Adam's Holiness,” 334–335. Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 116, 150–152. J. William Harmless, “Monasticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, 493–517, esp. 498–499. Arthur Urbano, Jr., “‘Read It Also to the Gentiles’: The Displacement and Recasting of the Philosopher in the *Vita Antonii*,” *CH* 77:4 (2008): 877–914, esp. 910–912.

takes spiritual exercises,¹² trains his focus,¹³ and has visionary experiences.¹⁴ He is a Christian sage,¹⁵ a “holy gnostic” by all intents and purposes, whose wisdom exceeds everyone else’s.¹⁶ The reference of Evagrius to Antony deciphering the book of nature, analysed in the second half of this chapter, corroborates Athanasian Antony’s contemplative profile. This should not come as a surprise. At the time, Egypt’s hermitages and monasteries were widely known as “divine houses of contemplation.”¹⁷ Either way, the profile of Athanasian Antony perfectly matches Hadot’s transformed and contemplative philosopher,¹⁸ leaving no doubt that there is more to Athanasius than scholars currently agree. The interplay between Adam and Antony within his discourse confirms it.

Athanasian Antony is by no means foreign to contemplation and his mirror image, Athanasian Adam, displays similar gnostic attributes. These include contemplative traits. Meijering aptly characterised Athanasian Adam as a “Platonic mystic” and a “Christian ascetic.”¹⁹ And since Adam’s portrait encodes the experience of Antony and his monastic company—as I have shown elsewhere²⁰—Antony is that very philosopher. They are inseparable and mirror each other. Thus, Antony and his monastic confrères decode Adam’s paradisiacal experience, while Adam discloses crucial elements pertaining to Antony’s desert philosophy, shared by his entourage.²¹ All that is attributed to Adam applies to Antony, and all that is attributed to Antony applies to Adam. Adam of *Gentiles* and Antony of *Life* connote one another, overlap, and complement each other. They are the obverse and the reverse of the medal. It follows that,

12 *Life* 5.5.29–30; 55.3.9–10. See Brakke, *Athanasius*, 231 and Neil et al., *Dreams*, 83, 88, 92.

13 *Life* 39.5.23–24, 43.3.8, 51.5.19–20.

14 *Life* 10.1.3–4; 66.1–3.1–10; 84.2.7. See Neil et al., *Dreams*, 105–109.

15 *Life* 14.2–3.

16 *Life* 72–80.

17 Gregory the Theologian quoted in Gwynn, *Athanasius*, 163.

18 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 81–125.

19 Meijering, *Athanasius*, 17; *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 5, 8–9 (here he uses the phrase “Platonic philosopher”). Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 146–147. For Athanasian Antony’s philosophical figure, see Columba Stewart, “Monastic Attitudes toward Philosophy and Philosophers,” *SP* 44 (2010): 321–327, esp. 323–324; “The Encounter of the Early Church with the Greek and Roman World: A View from Monastic Theology,” *CTSA* 61 (2006): 1–13, esp. 7–8.

20 Costache, “Adam’s Holiness,” 327–329, 332–333, 335–337. The identification of Adam and Antony within the Athanasian discourse casts new light upon the discussion, summarised by Louth (“The fourth-century Alexandrians,” 280), that *Life* is Hellenistic in its outlook. If Adam is Antony, then *Gentiles* and *Life* propose the same message and the latter treatise is as Athanasian as the former.

21 Brakke, *Athanasius*, 152.

since Adam is a contemplative ascetic, so Antony is too. Their stories intersect more than once. Here are further details.

Athanasian Adam endeavours to know God as well as created reality. By nature, the human being desires to know the Father and the Logos through whom he creates everything and through whom he speaks. But the sheer ontological gap between the created and the uncreated means that the attainment of divine knowledge is difficult: “God, the demiurge of the universe and the king of all, exists beyond all nature and human perception.”²² To facilitate connection, God configured Adam through Christ in the image of God’s Son.²³ It is thus that, in principle, Adam has direct access to God’s Son, nothing within his nature obstructing noetic sight.²⁴ Maintaining existential compatibility with the object of contemplation is nevertheless paramount. Adam must cultivate God’s likeness by purifying his heart in asceticism²⁵ and become graciously empowered.²⁶ This leads to his soul mirroring the divine²⁷ and forming God’s representation within itself.²⁸ It is thus that Adam can grasp things heavenly.²⁹ To his achievement contribute both his fellowship with the saints and his adopting a lifestyle like theirs.³⁰ In referring to the communion of the saints—we saw this earlier—Athanasius envisages Antony and his ascetic company. The confluence of the two stories results in an original iteration of Clement’s “holy gnostic” and of Origen’s saintly person. While the views of the early Alexandrians inform Athanasius’ portrayal of Adam, it is Antony who inspires it.

That this is so finds indirect confirmation in Athanasian Antony’s glorious figure at the end of a protracted retreat, which evokes the blessed status of Adam in paradise:

22 ὁ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ παντὸς δημιουργὸς καὶ παμβασιλεὺς Θεός, ὁ ὑπερέκεινα πάσης οὐσίας καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπινοίας ὑπάρχων (*Gentiles* 2.5–7).

23 *Gentiles* 2.7–8,17. Here, Athanasius echoes Origen’s position. Crouzel, *Origène*, 130–137, 161–162.

24 *Gentiles* 2.15–16. For God’s direct contemplation, see Meijering, *Athanasius*, 19.

25 *Gentiles* 2.15–35. For Adam’s purified heart, see Pettersen, *Athanasius*, 40–44. For further notes on purification and divine contemplation, see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 188 and Robertson, *Christ as Mediator*, 177–181.

26 *Gentiles* 2.13. See Hill, *Athanasius and the Holy Spirit*, 13–15 and Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 13–14.

27 *Gentiles* 2.33; 34.25. Cf. Louth, *Origins*, 77–78.

28 See τῆς περὶ Θεοῦ φαντασίας (“pertaining to God’s representation”; *Gentiles* 2.11–12). For this meaning of φαντασία, see Neil et al., *Dreams*, 96 n. 155.

29 *Gentiles* 2.19–21.

30 *Gentiles* 2.12,30–31.

Looking like one who is mystically initiated and a bearer of God, Antony emerged as though from the innermost sanctuary. This was the first time he revealed himself, out of the fortified encampment, to those that came to him. And as they gazed on him, they wondered at seeing the state in which his body was found, just as they knew him before seclusion—neither fat because of lack of exercise nor weakened because of fasting and combating demons. And the state of his soul was pure.³¹

This passage highlights the inner and outer health of the hermit, as an echo of Adam who “lived a happy, truly blessed, and immortal life.”³² Antony’s purity illustrates Adam’s purity. His luminous figure and his intimacy with the divine match Adam’s own. His mystical initiation corresponds to Adam’s pristine divine instruction. In both cases, purity, knowledge, and glory are the outcomes of ascetic endeavours enhanced by divine grace. And although in this case the reference to Adam’s paradisiacal state is indirect, other monastic sources state it explicitly. Elsewhere I have shown that a string of examples from *Sayings* affirm again and again the possibility of iterating Adam’s experience through ascetic undertakings.³³ In like manner, Antony’s achievements illustrate Adam’s blessed condition. What matters is the perfect match between the Athanasian depictions of Antony and Adam, in terms of purity, spiritual knowledge, and participation in the divine.

Knowing God is not, however, the only object of the contemplative ascetic. Taking his cue from Clement and Origen, Athanasius proposes two complementary approaches. The earlier outline of divine knowledge in paradise corresponds to the view from above, which establishes a theological vantage point for the contemplation of nature. At its core, as we just discovered, are the divine image and the mirroring power of the pure heart, graciously enhanced. But Athanasius also outlines a gradual approach—from below—beginning with natural contemplation and ending with theological vision. *Gentiles* 2, which focuses on matters epistemological under the guise of Adam’s story,³⁴ does not

31 *Life* 14.2.6–3.14. For notes on this passage, see Neil et al., *Dreams*, 83. Cf. *Life* 67.4.11–13; 67.5.17–6.25.

32 *Gentiles* 2.15.

33 Costache, “Adam’s Holiness,” 338–339.

34 The “gnostic” dimension of *Gentiles* 2 is inescapable; so is Adam’s portrait therein. The list of relevant terms and phrases on display there is rich: ἐπίνοια (thought; 2.6); θεωρητήν καὶ ἐπιστήμονα (contemplative and knowledgeable; 2.9); ἐνοίαν καὶ γνῶσιν (concept and knowledge; 2.11); φαντασία (imagination, here the capacity to represent reality, notion; 2.12); θείου γνῶσιν (knowledge of the divine; 2.16); θεωρέω (to contemplate; 2.16); κατανοέω

present the relevant material in logical order, but four steps in this trajectory can be discerned. To these I must now turn.³⁵

The text indicates the first stage when it depicts Adam as “contemplative and knowledgeable of the beings” (τῶν ὄντων θεωρητὴν καὶ ἐπιστήμονα),³⁶ a researcher, as it were. As with Clement’s Abraham, the “holy gnostic” par excellence, Adam examines nature by combining contemplative and curricular tools. Perceived through a multifocal lens, the universe is orderly and harmonious.³⁷ Its order is meaningful. We read elsewhere that “the whole cosmos consists in reason, wisdom, and science” (λόγῳ καὶ σοφίᾳ καὶ ἐπιστήμῃ συνέστηκε).³⁸ This must be a paraphrase of LXX Ps 18:1–2, but it also reminds us of Clement’s numbers and Origen’s patterns discussed in Chapters Two and Three, together with the Disciple’s connected universe discussed in Chapter One. The second stage of natural contemplation focuses on finding proofs of God’s providence in the universe. As we read, “Upon perceiving it, [Adam] exceedingly admires his [God’s] providence towards the universe.”³⁹ Echoes from Origen reverberate here. This stage draws on faith, favouring a theological grasp of the creation. But Adam’s delighting in the marks of divine providence still anchors contemplation in the epistemological endeavours of the previous stage. One contemplates theologically what one discovers about the world through scientific research. The analogies considered in the last section of Chapter Two explain how this works: as the lyre points to the musician who plays the song, the ordered universe denotes its maker’s wisdom and providence.

The third phase is Adam’s accession to gnosis—which corresponds to the beginning of Clement’s reversed epoptic—and is about perceiving the creation through a divine lens. To grasp the divine attributes is primarily a gift from above, an outcome of divine revelation. As we read, God “granted him [sc. Adam] the concept and knowledge of his own eternity.”⁴⁰ The passage does not

(to understand; 2.18); δύναμις τοῦ νοῦ (power of the mind; 2.21); ἡδόμενος (one who sees or realises; 2.26); θεωρία (vision; 2.26); κατοπτρίζεσθαι (to behold as in a mirror; 2.33).

35 To describe these four phases, I draw on Costache, “Adam’s Holiness,” 328–329. An echo of this approach features in the discourse of Abba Moses recorded by John Cassian. See his *On the Holy Fathers of Sketis and On Discernment*, in *Φιλοκαλία*, ed. Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (Venice, 1782), 1:79.

36 *Gentiles* 2.9.

37 *Gentiles* 4.21–22. See Meijering, *Athanasius*, 115.

38 *Gentiles* 40.20.

39 ὑπερεκπλήττεται δὲ κατανόων τὴν δι’ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ πᾶν πρόνοιαν (*Gentiles* 2.18–19). *Contra* Lyman (see *Christology and Cosmology*, 139–140), Athanasius did not downplay the role of providence.

40 δοὺς αὐτῷ καὶ τῆς ἰδίας αἰδιότητος ἔνοιαν καὶ γνῶσιν (*Gentiles* 2.10–11).

go beyond this statement. But grasping God's eternity is another way of realising the nature of the universe, that it is created, providentially maintained, and therefore not eternal. Athanasius is clear about the natural weakness, fluidity, and mortality of the cosmos, which makes it wholly dependent on divine mercy.⁴¹ In Chapter Five we shall see that Basil adopted an identical position. In this light, the contemplative person grasps the loving relationship between the universe and its maker. Finally, the fourth stage, epoptic by all intents and purposes, is to attain the "gnosis regarding the divine,"⁴² which refers to contemplating God the Logos and rejoicing in him.⁴³ This experience corresponds to Athanasian Antony's "finding enjoyment in the contemplation of divine realities,"⁴⁴ which, incidentally, lends further support to my conviction that Adam of *Gentiles* 2 is configured after Antony's towering figure. But what matters is that this final stage of Adam's quest amounts to the incomparable elation of a supernatural experience. As Dostoievsky articulated the culminating outcomes of natural contemplation, "a joy without which the world cannot stand and be."⁴⁵

In summary, contemplation proceeds from understanding the world to searching for the divine traces within it to realising the creator's difference from the creation to the knowledge of the creator, as the Father's Logos. One must remember, however, that what makes these four stages possible are the theological and monastic prerequisites of being created in God's image, graciously endowed, and ascetically purified⁴⁶—precisely the qualities which Antony illustrated. As such, what Athanasius has to say about Adam's contemplative undertakings draws on Antony's experience.

We cannot find in Athanasius a curriculum after the fashion of Clement, but his approach to natural contemplation is no less complex. Furthermore, corresponding to his Alexandrian predecessors, for him natural contemplation is not

41 *Gentiles* 41.10–12, 16–17. Recent scholars have remarked the significance of the Athanasian views of creation, providence, and the fragility of the universe. See Costache, "The Orthodox Doctrine of Creation," 52, 55. Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 110–111. Pettersen, *Athanasius*, 24–26. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 138–139. For a general outline of his doctrine of creation, see Florovsky, *Aspects of Church History*, 49–60.

42 τὴν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ γνῶσιν (*Gentiles* 2.16).

43 *Gentiles* 2.13–18. In commenting upon this passage Meijering (*Athanasius*, 17) refers only to the knowledge of the created beings.

44 ἔχαιρε μὲν τῇ τῶν θεῶν θεωρίᾳ (*Gentiles* 2.16).

45 Dostoievsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 107.

46 These qualities reappear in *Gentiles* 30.6–10; 33.26–28; 34.12–26. Cf. *Life* 30.2.4–5, for their correspondences in the story of Athanasian Antony.

only about method; it is a matter of who the contemplative is. Whether he refers to Adam or to Antony, he always means the ascetically purified contemplative.

I must now turn to his most characteristic treatment of the cosmos, briefly mentioned in Chapter Two: the textual representation.

1.2 *The Cosmos as “Another Scripture”*

As the fourfold outline suggests, natural contemplation requires skills and qualities comparable—and related—to those required for divine knowledge.

Echoing the convictions of Clement and Origen discussed in Chapter Three, for Athanasius the human being is by nature equipped for the theological contemplation of the universe. As he states, “the body has eyes in order to see the creation (εἰς τὸ τὴν κτίσιν ὁρᾶν), so that through its harmonious composition (διὰ τῆς παναρμονίου ταύτης συντάξεως) one can know the maker.”⁴⁷ This natural equipment mirrors the divine image that makes possible the contemplation of God, as we have seen above. But when “the soul falls away from the contemplation of good things,”⁴⁸ it can no longer contemplate; not successfully anyway. Worse still, base passions and a corresponding misuse of nature altogether supplant people’s innate interest in grasping reality; they become entangled with futile affairs.⁴⁹ Being “held back by bodily encumbrances,” to paraphrase Lovecraft again,⁵⁰ their cognitive aptitudes fall short. To know the cosmos theologically, to grasp the natural world in the manner described earlier, they must therefore acquire gnostic aptitude. What makes this possible are ascetic purification and contemplative exercises, by which they change their line of sight.⁵¹ The same is true of divine contemplation, which takes as its starting point the reverse, godwards turn.⁵² In both cases, the heart’s purity is sine qua non. The result of this renovation of life and perception is a genuine broadening of horizons, past the point of merely getting misty glimpses of the truth. Indeed, when people consider the universe in a gnostic way—after Adam’s and Antony’s manner—they see it as “another scripture,” wherein they discern the “syntactic” relation of the creation with its creator. In what follows I discuss the outcomes of this way of looking at the world.

47 *Gentiles* 4.21–22.

48 ἡ ψυχὴ ἀποστᾶσα τῆς πρὸς τὰ καλὰ θεωρίας (*Gentiles* 4.25–26).

49 *Gentiles* 4.29–30. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 148, 154, 156. Hill, *Athanasius and the Holy Spirit*, 15–17. Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 15–17.

50 Lovecraft, “Beyond the Wall of Sleep,” 44.

51 *Gentiles* 30.10–13; 34.22–26; *Life* 20.9.31–36; 38.3.9–11.

52 *Gentiles* 34.14–15.

The views of Athanasius are no more soteriological and no less cosmological than Clement's and Origen's,⁵³ but cosmology pure and simple is not his main concern. Apart from the scriptural distinction between visible and invisible,⁵⁴ his universe does not have definite contours. The cosmos is, after all, a work in progress, the created being experiencing motion and change in all its parts and on all its levels.⁵⁵ His interest is in depicting the cosmos as theologically meaningful, as "another scripture." The analogies discussed in Chapter Two—of the lyre and of the chorus⁵⁶—while being integral to his search for the theological meaningfulness of the world, do not exhaust his view of the cosmos and of natural contemplation. For example, *Gentiles* 2–5, partially discussed above, speaks of spiritual perception as a prerequisite for both natural and divine contemplation. By contrast, the muddled sight pertaining to the passionate life obfuscates one's grasp of reality. Athanasius returns to the contemplation of the cosmos in *Gentiles* 35–44,⁵⁷ on which I focus in what follows. There, the argument runs as follows: by keenly observing nature, believers—specifically the purified and contemplative ascetics—grasp the cosmic harmony and, through it, the relation of the world to its creator. Everything within the cosmos encodes a theological message which the contemplative ascetics are able to decode as though reading a book.

53 See on this Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 125, 140.

54 *Gentiles* 34.9–11 (invisible soul, visible matter); 42.3, 33–34 (the universe is seen and unseen); 44.26–27 (the Logos moves the visible universe as well as the invisible powers). This is the broader context for what Anatolios calls "unity-within-distinction" in Athanasian cosmology. Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The coherence of his thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 49.

55 Here is what *Gentiles* has to say. The soul moves by nature (4.8–9, 32–33); the elements move (28.48–50); the life of the soul is movement (33.15); the sky and the celestial bodies move (35.30–40); God moves and enlightens all things (38.46–47); the orderly movement of the universe points to its creator (39.26–28); the movement of the universe is not irrational (40.18); the waters move within their bounds (42.14–15); the Logos moves all things according to their natural properties (42.29, 34–36); the Logos puts all things in motion according to their nature (44.16–19, 25–29). Dumitru Stăniloae discussed in depth the dynamism of the creation in Athanasius, which, according to him, paves the way for the modern theologies of movement. Dumitru Stăniloae, "Studiu introductiv," in *Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare: Scrieri*, first part, PSB 15 (București: EIBMBOR, 1987), 5–26, esp. 19–25. See Costache, "A Theology of the World," 209–212.

56 *Gentiles* 38.35–47; 42.22–28; 43.1–7, 27–32.

57 Several scholars analysed these chapters. Anatolios, *Athanasius: Coherence*, 45–54. Meijering, *Athanasius*, 115–144; *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 31–38. Pettersen, *Athanasius*, 44–47. I cannot discuss here *Gentiles* 31.37–41 and 33.22–28, on scanning the invisible, possibly associated with ecstatic experiences. See on these passages Brakke, *Athanasius*, 250–252 and Neil et al., *Dreams*, 109–113.

Here is how natural contemplation works. After grasping the diversity of the creation—its various layers and innumerable beings—the contemplative persons take stock of “the mutual need of the parts” (ἡ τῶν μερῶν πρὸς ἀλληλα χρεία).⁵⁸ Their interdependence denotes incompleteness. In turn, the discovery of incompleteness leads to the realisation that the universe depends ontologically on the Logos,⁵⁹ the “creator and demiurge” of all.⁶⁰ Note the use of the polysemous words ποιητής, meaning creator, poet, or author,⁶¹ and δημιουργός, signifying maker, producer, artist, or manufacturer of some sort. Accordingly, the contemplative persons discern two divine activities—creation and organisation—which denote two stages within the process of world-making. This distinction was common in the early Christian thought.⁶²

Related, the contemplative persons realise that the creator is an artist and the creation an artwork. This realisation leads them to perceive the creation as artistic expression of God’s intention and therefore as divine revelation. References to creator and creation as the artist and the artwork permeate *Gentiles*.⁶³ Accordingly, and mirroring Clement’s Orpheus, Athanasius uses Phidias as an analogy for the creator.⁶⁴ As any sculpture by Phidias points to its creator, so does the world. The cosmos of Athanasius might be less musical than Clement’s, but it is still an exquisite work of art whose harmonious proportions reveal the creator’s artistic vision and message.⁶⁵ For this reason, when the contemplative persons “look up to the sky, seeing its beauty and the light of the stars, they infer the existence of the Logos who adorns them.”⁶⁶ It is the same with the interdependence of the components of the universe. “Indicat-

58 *Gentiles* 27.24.

59 *Gentiles* 36–37.

60 ποιητής και δημιουργός (*Gentiles* 27.16–19). Cf. *Gentiles* 38.22–29, 42–47. This is not the only place where creation’s natural imperfection comes to the fore. Cf. *Gentiles* 41.10–12, 16–17. For creation’s dependence on the creator in Athanasius, see Behr, *Christian Theology*, 2.1:179–180.

61 The polysemy of ποιητής played an important role in the Platonic tradition. Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* 67–87. Luc Brisson, *Lectures de Platon*, BHP (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 209–218. Athanasius adhered to this very tradition. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 114–147.

62 We encountered the same distinction in the Diognetan worldview and in Origen. For more examples, see Costache, “The Orthodox Doctrine of Creation,” 50–54.

63 *Gentiles* 35.1–9, 12–14; 36.1–24; 37.1–15; 38.1–5; 39.33–39.

64 *Gentiles* 35.9–12. Cf. Clement, *Exhortation* 1.1.1; 1.2.4.

65 Anatolios (*Athanasius: Coherence*, 48) pointed out that “the primary rationale for the cosmos, according to Athanasius, is to communicate knowledge of God to humanity.”

66 ἀναβλέψαντας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἰδόντας τὸν κόσμον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ τῶν ἀστρῶν φῶς, ἔστιν ἐνθυμείσθαι τὸν ταῦτα διακοσμοῦντα Λόγον (*Gentiles* 45.1–3).

ing and signifying" (γνωρίζει και σημαίνει)⁶⁷ the provident creator on whom the parts rely, interdependence leads the contemplative persons to a theological apprehension of reality. The findings of natural contemplation correspond to what Scripture teaches about creator and creation.⁶⁸ Thus, the entire cosmos appears as a theological signifier, requiring syntactic analysis.

Under the gaze of the contemplative ascetics, the meaningful web of created beings reveals its scriptural, syntactic, or narrative valences. The background of this perception is Athanasius' Logos-theory.⁶⁹ Central to this theory is the axiom that God's Reason, or Word, is the source of creation's rationality and semantic nature.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the cosmos as the creation of the divine Reason represents a theological poem or a narrative that denotes its creator. Thus,

Knowledge about God can be gained from visible things (ἀπὸ τῶν φαινομένων). By its order and harmony (διὰ τῆς τάξεως καὶ ἀρμονίας) the creation signifies and proclaims (σημαίνουσης καὶ βοῶσης) its master and creator as though through letters (ὥσπερ γράμμασι).⁷¹

Note the consistency of the Athanasian vocabulary in regard to rendering the meaningful aspect of cosmic reality; we already encountered the idea of a creation whose order and harmony signifies and proclaims the creator. This passage presents the world as "another scripture," a book written in the divine alphabet of the Logos. The suggestion that the contemplative persons must follow hermeneutical principles to read the theological message encoded in the universe is inescapable.⁷² But, together with analytical skills, this hermeneutic presupposes personal purification and the contemplative acuity of the interpreters.

Interestingly, the excerpt under consideration does not mention any prerequisites with regard to knowledge. This might be so because of Athanasius' desire to affirm the superiority of the Christian worldview to competing ideas,⁷³ superiority marked by its availability to all believers. It goes the same for his views of the soul's natural aptitude for introspection, which, even elevated by faith

67 *Gentiles* 27.24–25.

68 *Gentiles* 35.18–30 (quoting Rom 1:20 and Acts 14:15–17).

69 The centrality of the Logos is obvious. See e.g. *Gentiles* 35.1–8; 40.23–27; 44.29–34. Scholars have not missed it. Anatolios, *Athanasius: Coherence*, 50–51. Leithart, *Athanasius*, 99–100.

70 See *Gentiles* 40.19–22.

71 *Gentiles* 34.29–31. See Blowers, "Contemplation of Nature," 154.

72 Blowers, "Doctrine of Creation," 917–921; "Contemplation of Nature," 154.

73 In *Gentiles* 23, faulty representations of reality led the ancients to polytheism, as a result of ignoring "the Father's true Logos, Christ the saviour of all" (esp. 23.39–47).

and grace, is still available to all.⁷⁴ But the broader framework of *Gentiles*, we discovered already, shows that philosophical exercises such as introspection and natural contemplation require ascetic purification as well as theological insight.⁷⁵ Only in this way can the contemplative persons read the two books, namely, Scripture and the “other scripture,” the cosmos.⁷⁶

To the eyes of the contemplative ascetics, the scriptural character of the cosmos emerges as a σύνταξις⁷⁷ (syntax, composition, coordination, convergence, or meaningful order) and a τάξις⁷⁸ (order). These terms denote, more than the harmony of the universe, its narrative constitution. For example, a passage which we encountered earlier states that the human beings can “know the maker through this harmonious composition” (διὰ τῆς παναρμονίου ταύτης συντάξεως) of the cosmos.⁷⁹ Composite order, σύνταξις, is meaningful, syntactic. The use of the word σύνταξις in a cosmological sense is a hallmark of *Gentiles*, where it also denotes various other things. It features in the plural “compositions” with reference to patristic treatises;⁸⁰ in regards to the invention of grammar;⁸¹ and as “right order” in the anthropological rendition of the analogy of the lyre.⁸² In these cases, together with order in general, σύνταξις signifies respectively information communicated (writings), meaning (grammar), and harmony (the sound of the lyre). In the first and the second occurrences, the word refers to texts and what makes the writing of texts possible, namely, grammar. In the third occurrence, it refers to the consonance of strings. These associations are telling: the cosmological application of σύνταξις as meaningful order is thoroughly connected with books, grammar, and the harmony of strings. The

74 *Gentiles* 30–34; *Life* 72–80. See Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 29, 39, 68 and Behr, *Christian Theology*, 2.1:170–171.

75 Introspection and vision require purification (*Gentiles* 30.2,13; 33.26–28; 34.15–19,22–26). So does natural contemplation (*Gentiles* 2.15–35; 30.10–13; 33.27–28; 34.22–26). See Neil et al., *Dreams*, 112–113. By establishing the correspondence between introspection and contemplation, Athanasius anticipates *The Philokalia*. For a succinct outline of the relevant *philokalic* message, see the fourth tale in *The Way of a Pilgrim: Candid Tales of a Wanderer to his Spiritual Father*, trans. Anna Zaranko, intro. Andrew Louth, Penguin Classics (Penguin Books, 2019), 81.

76 Similarly, in the second tale, the Russian pilgrim refers to the grace which led him to understand both Scripture and nature in the light of *The Philokalia*. See *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 26–27.

77 *Gentiles* 4.22; 38.2–3 etc.

78 *Gentiles* 34.30; 36.21; 37.19; 38.1,17,45 etc.

79 *Gentiles* 4.21–22.

80 συντάξεις. *Gentiles* 1.13.

81 Palamedes “invented the meaningful order (σύνταξιν) of the letters.” *Gentiles* 18.29–31.

82 σύνταξις ὁρθή (*Gentiles* 31.30). I addressed other occurrences of this analogy in Chapter Two.

use of σύνταξις, therefore, is not without significance for Athanasius' natural contemplation, denoting the perception of a meaningful, narrative universe. This perception corresponds to the appraisal of created beings as letters.

But this is not the only way in which the contemplative persons apprehend the meaningful order of the creation. *Gentiles* articulates the same perception—alternatively and in liturgical perspective—as illumination, enlightenment. As did Clement—and Justin Martyr before him⁸³—Athanasius borrows the terminology of illumination from the baptismal rite of initiation, known as enlightenment, φωτισμός. Thus, the Logos is the “enlightener”⁸⁴ of the universe, “illuminating all the visible and the unseen” reality.⁸⁵ Accordingly, apart from being firmly preserved in existence, the whole of the cosmos is as “enlightened” as the initiated members of the church are.⁸⁶ It follows that, as such—metaphorically baptised or illumined—the cosmos reads better, facilitating the access of the contemplative ascetics to its theological message. It is true that “illumination” could simply be a metaphor of light for the ordered universe and its beauty, but it also denotes meaningfulness and syntactic order. In Chapter Two we discovered that Athanasius construes salvation as enlightenment, that is, the deliverance of the creation from misrepresentation through the disclosure of its true nature.⁸⁷ The correspondence of these two views is obvious. So illumined, the meaningful order of the universe proclaims the Father’s “glory and knowledge” to all.⁸⁸ Whatever the terms he uses, Athanasius perceives the cosmos as a theologically meaningful discourse.

I must now turn to the mechanics of his cosmological hermeneutic. The meaningful structure of creation and the syntactic insights of the contemplative ascetics into the order of the universe draw upon the same source, Christ the Logos, who reveals divine wisdom. Where someone who has no fellowship with the Logos sees only *res extensa*, meaningless quantities, the contemplative persons—whom the divine Logos directly guides and instructs—see letters, patterns, and theological truths. As with the divinely taught Antony,⁸⁹ the Logos teaches the contemplative persons to read the narrative of the cosmos as “another scripture.” It is thus that they discern both the message and its

83 *Apology on Behalf of Christians* 61.12.2–3.

84 *Gentiles* 44.17.

85 *Gentiles* 42.3.

86 *Gentiles* 41.24.

87 *Incarnation* 15, 29, 31. In a clearer manner, *Incarnation* 40.53–54 proclaims: “Christ arrived, plainly enlightening all things with his own light.”

88 *Gentiles* 44.31–32.

89 On the Logos guiding Antony, see Behr, *Christian Theology*, 2.1:256–257.

origin, the letter and its writer. This is another point where Clement's influence becomes transparent. We know from Chapter Two that Clement sees the Logos as the source of cosmic meaningfulness and the teacher of humankind.⁹⁰ Likewise, as he develops his discourse from Logos-theory, Athanasius speaks of something more than the divine activities of creation and providence, namely, the guidance which the Logos gives to the contemplative ascetics towards grasping the theological depths of reality. Divinely led by the book's own author, the Logos, they perceive the beings and their relations as so many letters and sentences. Also deriving from Clement, perhaps also from Origen, must be Athanasius' treatment of natural contemplation as a form of scriptural interpretation. And since, as Blowers and Lollar proved,⁹¹ this treatment belongs to other authors too, the input of Athanasius represents the missing link between Clement, Origen, and later writers such as the Cappadocians, Evagrius, and Maximus. In the second part of this chapter I highlight Athanasius' impact on Evagrius.

Until then, it is noteworthy that, while Blowers referred to Athanasius several times, Lollar ignored his input completely. But the passage earlier discussed—on reading created beings as so many letters⁹²—fits the specifics of anagogic hermeneutic precisely. It goes the same for the musical analogies discussed in Chapter Two. What matters is that, as in traditional hermeneutics, for Athanasius both the cosmic text and the contemplative interpreters operate within the parameters of divine inspiration.⁹³ The cosmic text encodes the Word which the interpreters seek behind the narrative's many words.

A practical example of natural contemplation will clarify the dynamics of this process. Earlier I reconstructed this method based on *Gentiles* 2, but on that occasion I did not refer to scriptural hermeneutics. What I have discussed just above bridges the two representations. In what follows I return to the earlier model, simplified, as an anagogic progression from analysis to understanding. This modified schema entails two stages.

First, the contemplative interpreters undertake to apprehend cosmic order, which corresponds to analysing the scriptural text. Second, they look for the theological meaning of order, which corresponds to the scriptural higher sense. We find this very approach towards the end of *Gentiles*, in another familiar

90 Clement, *Exhortation* 1.7.3. See Costache, "Being," 58–59.

91 Blowers, "Doctrine of Creation," 917–921; "Contemplation of Nature," 164–169. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 120–159.

92 *Gentiles* 34.29–31.

93 See Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 182–188.

passage.⁹⁴ There we read that the contemplative ascetics “look up to the sky, seeing its beauty and the light of the stars,” which amounts to realising cosmic order.⁹⁵ After this first stage, they undertake to pinpoint the source of the ordered universe, “the Logos who adorns” all things.⁹⁶ The passage sketches a progression from grasping the cosmic order to considering its divine source. Additionally, the contemplative persons identify the Logos as being together with the Father, whose “interpreter and messenger” he is.⁹⁷ The passage suggests a hermeneutical appraisal of the cosmos in two stages, but the items present within it lend support to my fourfold outline of natural contemplation. Specifically, the first stage of both schemas coincide perfectly, while the last three stages pertaining to the *Gentiles* 2 schema describe in detail the second stage of the schema based on *Gentiles* 45. It follows that both schemas unfold the usual hermeneutical trajectory from analysis to interpretation—or from grasping the textual foundations to understanding their significance in theological perspective. These findings show that Athanasian natural contemplation indeed follows a hermeneutical pattern, which takes as a starting point the view of the cosmos as “another scripture.”

Meijering noted the existence of a lengthy exercise of natural contemplation, hidden within the economy of *Gentiles*. According to him, the exercise begins in ch. 27 by discussing the natural laws, continues in ch. 40 by inferring the fundamental principle of the universe, and ends in ch. 44 by identifying the principle as the Logos of the Father.⁹⁸ The schema in *Gentiles* 45 therefore seems to play the role of a conclusion to this expanded exercise. Meijering’s findings confirm my view that *Gentiles* contains exercises of natural contemplation.

In conclusion, Athanasius, in his quest to understand reality, deploys a range of approaches. His Logos-theory made him sensitive to the theological meaningfulness of the ordered universe, which, in turn, constitutes the object of natural contemplation. While his contemplative method draws on established patterns, it further clarifies the need of hermeneutically decoding the narrative of that “other scripture,” the cosmos. Athanasius remains faithful to Clement and Origen’s main assumption, namely, the virtue of the contemplative as *sine qua non* for true contemplation. Here, his contribution consists in the brilliant idea of modelling his contemplative ascetic after Antony and other desert dwellers.

94 *Gentiles* 45.1–5.

95 *Gentiles* 45.1–2.

96 *Gentiles* 45.3.

97 *Gentiles* 45.3–5.

98 Meijering, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes*, 142.

I must now turn to another witness of this tradition, Evagrius, who continued to render the experiences of his contemporary ascetics using traditional Alexandrian categories.

2 Evagrius

One of the most controversial early Christian theologians undoubtedly remains the erudite monastic from Pontus, Evagrius, who flourished in the second half of the fourth century. Within the succinct biographical sketch that preface his writings in *The Philokalia*, Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, the editor of this important collection, introduces him as “Evagrius, the wise and eloquent man.”⁹⁹ After studying with the Cappadocian fathers, he found spiritual shelter at Melania and Rufinus’ ascetic settlement near Jerusalem. He then spent his last years in the desert settlements of Nitria and Kellia as a disciple of both Macarii, the Egyptian and the Alexandrian.¹⁰⁰ He distinguished himself to such an extent, that he was acknowledged as a spiritual master in his own right, both during his lifetime and later.¹⁰¹ Historical circumstances led to his name being drawn into the whirlpool of ecclesiastical politics, causing the repeated condemnation of his speculative thinking, posthumously, from the early fifth into the mid-sixth century.¹⁰²

99 *Φιλοκαλία*, 1:39.

100 Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 19–27. A.M. Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, ECF (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 9–13. Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, OTRM (Oxford University Press, 2005), 9–16. Antoine Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le pontique*, TT (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 25–64. Antoine Guillaumont, “Étude historique et doctrinale,” in *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique ou Le moine*, vol. 1, ed. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, SC 170 (Paris: Cerf, 1971), 21–125, esp. 21–25. Antoine Guillaumont, *Les Képhalaia gnostica d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, PaS 5 (Paris: Seuil, 1962), 48–59. Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, “Evagrius Ponticus, the Origenian Ascetic (and not the Origenistic ‘Heretic’),” in *Orthodox Monasticism Past and Present*, ed. John A. McGuckin (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015), 159–224. Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, “Evagrius and Gregory: Nazianzen or Nyssen? Cappadocian (and Origenian) Influence on Evagrius,” *GRBS* 53 (2013): 117–137. Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy,” in John Behr et al. (eds), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 241–271, esp. 242–253.

101 Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 50–55. Guillaumont, “Étude,” 26–27; *Les Képhalaia gnostica*, 69–80; *Un philosophe au désert*, 65–75. Stewart, “Monastic Pedagogy,” 247–248.

102 Augustine Casiday, “Gabriel Bunge and the Study of Evagrius Ponticus,” *SVTQ* 48:2 (2004): 249–297; *Reconstructing*, 55–61; *Evagrius*, 14–22. Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 16–17.

The controversial points arose in his *Chapters*,¹⁰³ written (as Clement's *Teacher* and Origen's *Principles*) for advanced students and not to be taken at face value. Evagrius shared with Clement and Origen the view that the spiritually mature are to receive instruction through obscure and enigmatic statements, to challenge them and to sharpen their acuity of mind. After all, this kind of advanced student ever aspires to fuller and higher vistas of thought.¹⁰⁴ In turn, gnostic discourses and writings must be kept away from untrained, impassioned, and untamed audiences.¹⁰⁵ However, later readers, whom Evagrius would have undoubtedly dismissed from his school, took *Chapters* literally and misunderstood their message. This treatment matches what the same readers and also others did with Clement and Origen's corresponding works. No wonder all three were either accused or merely suspected of heretical thinking. Not even the appreciation of great monastic writers such as Diadochus of Photiki, John Climacus, Maximus the Confessor, and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain managed to change this stance.¹⁰⁶ Fortunately, the situation differs

Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 77–95. Alexander Golitzin, "The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God's Glory in a Form': Controversy over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth, Early Fifth Century Monastic Literature," *StM* 44 (2002): 13–43, esp. 28–33. Guillaumont, *Les Képhalaia gnostica*, 59–69, 81–170. David E. Linge, "Leading the Life of Angels: Ascetic Practice and Reflection in the Writings of Evagrius of Pontus," *JAAAR* 68:3 (2000): 537–568, esp. 538–540. David A. Michelson, "Philoxenos of Mabbug and the Simplicity of Evagrian Gnosis: Competing Uses of Evagrius in the Early Sixth Century," in *Evagrius and His Legacy*, ed. Joel Kalvesmaki and Robin Darling Young (University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 175–205.

103 The text referred throughout is found in Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika: A New Translation of the Unreformed Text from the Syriac*, WGRW 38 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

104 Evagrius conveys this nuance as a wish: "May the disciples say to you, 'friend, advance further up!' It would be a shame for you, being elevated, to be drawn again down by the listeners" (*Gnostic* 29). Casiday, *Evagrius*, 26–27, 36–37. Costache, "Christian Gnosis," 265. Guillaumont, *Les Képhalaia gnostica*, 32–35. Rebecca Krawiec, "Literacy and Memory in Evagrius's Monasticism," *J ECS* 21:3 (2013): 363–390, esp. 371–372. Linge, "Leading the Life of Angels," 542. Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, O ECS (Oxford University Press, 2003), xxxvi. This stance is unquestionably Platonic, possibly mediated by Philo. See Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 432–433.

105 *Gnostic* 25; 35–36; *Letter* 1–2, 17 (in Casiday, *Evagrius*, 64–77). See Casiday, *Evagrius* 31–35 and J.G. Bunge, "Origenismus—Gnostizismus: zum geistesgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrios Pontikos," *VC* 40:1 (1986): 24–54, esp. 34–35.

106 For Evagrius' posthumous supporters, see three studies in vol. *Evagrius and His Legacy*: Julia Konstantinovskiy, "Evagrius Ponticus and Maximus the Confessor: The Building of the Self in Praxis and Contemplation," 128–152; Gregory Collins, "The Evagrian Heritage in Late Byzantine Monasticism," 317–331; Columba Stewart, "Evagrius beyond Byzantium: The Latin and Syriac Receptions," 206–235. See also Paul Géhin, "D'Égypte en Mésopotamie:

significantly in recent scholarship. Mirroring new developments in Clement and Origen studies, a range of scholars have unveiled profound sides of Evagrius' thinking, leading to a reinterpretation of the man and his work, though no less controversial.¹⁰⁷

In what follows I focus on his little studied work,¹⁰⁸ *Gnostic*, which presents snippets of the life and activities of the advanced ascetic, including matters pertaining to natural contemplation and its prerequisites, such as catharsis and intellectual training. We shall see that these cohere with what Evagrius had to say in other writings. I conclude by a summary of his insights collected from throughout the corpus. While the work under consideration outlines methodological matters, it does not discuss the outcomes of contemplation in detail.

la réception d'Évagre le Pontique dans les communautés syriaques," in *Monachismes d'Orient: Images, échanges, influences; Hommage à Antoine Guillaumont*, ed. Florence Julien and Marie-Joseph Pierre, BEHESR 148 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 29–49.

107 I already mentioned several important sources; here are a couple more. Gabriel Bunge, *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011). Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 61–64. That said, other scholars point out Evagrius' less than orthodox views and approaches, theologically as well as metaphysically. Brian E. Daley, "Evagrius and Capadocian Orthodoxy," in *Evagrius and His Legacy*, 14–48. Alexander Golitzin, *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*, ed. Bogdan G. Bucur, CS 250 (Trappist, KY and Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications and Liturgical Press, 2013), 310, 312–313; "Controversy over the Divine Body," 29; *Et Introibo*, 323. Jean Gribomont, "Monasticism and Asceticism: Eastern Christianity," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 89–112, esp. 104. William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 318–320. Kannegiesser, "Antony, Athanasius, Evagrius," 8.

108 References to this writing are quite scarce in contemporary scholarship. References are altogether missing in Luke Dysinger, "An Exegetical Way of Seeing: Contemplation and Spiritual Guidance in Evagrius Ponticus," *SP* 57 (2013): 31–50. Casiday's *Evagrius and Reconstructing* mention it several times, as the second part of Evagrius' triptych and in order to provide support for assertions developed elsewhere. It goes the same for Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century*, ASPTLA (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). For a little more than these, see Luke Dysinger, "Evagrius Ponticus, Exegete of the Soul," in *Evagrius and His Legacy*, 73–95, esp. 74–76. See also David T. Bradford, "Evagrius Ponticus and the Psychology of 'Natural Contemplation,'" *SS* 22 (2012): 109–125 and Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*. Recent sources that engage more solidly *Gnostic* are Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer* (see the list of references at 237), Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika* (see the list of references at 400), and Stewart, "Monastic Pedagogy," 241–271 (though in connection with other works). For a focused study, see Robin Darling Young, "Evagrius the Iconographer: Monastic Pedagogy in the *Gnostikos*," *J ECS* 9:1 (2001): 53–71. So far the most important study remains the one written by the modern editors, A. and C. Guillaumont. See "Introduction" to *Évagre le Pontique: Le Gnostique*, 9–84.

One should look elsewhere in order to retrieve his map of the world. That said, I propose that *Gnostic* represents the proper tool for decoding the otherwise enigmatic shape of Evagrius' worldview—indeed the spirit of his speculative discourse.

2.1 *Introducing Gnostic and Its Sources*

Reconstructed by Antoine and Claire Guillaumont from ten Greek manuscripts collated with fourteen Syriac codices and four Armenian,¹⁰⁹ Evagrius' *Gnostic* constitutes the second part of a triptych with *Monk* and *Chapters*.¹¹⁰ Corresponding to its intermediary position, it combines matters of asceticism and matters of speculative thinking. As shown in the prologue to the first part of the triptych, the three tomes mirror the familiar tripartite curriculum, rendered as practical life (or, sometimes, right behaviour), natural contemplation, and theology.¹¹¹ Without the work mentioning either Clement or Origen, undoubtedly Evagrius' threefold pattern draws upon their curriculum of ethics, physics, and epoptics, or enoptics.¹¹² This correspondence is significant insofar as it documents his familiarity with the early masters, but comparing their shared interest in triadic patterns falls outside the scope of this study.

Gnostic comprises fifty κεφάλαια or chapters of variable length,¹¹³ of which only thirty are fully extant in the original Greek, plus one partially preserved

109 A. and C. Guillaumont, "Introduction," 15–16.

110 A. and C. Guillaumont, "Introduction," 17–23. Guillaumont, "Étude," 31–32; *Un philosophe au désert*, 100–105; *Les Képhalaia gnostica*, 16–17. Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 318. Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, xxvii–xxviii.

111 *Monk* prologue, 8.53–58. Cf. *Monk* 1 and *Gnostic* 12, 13, 49.

112 Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 18–24. Louth, *Origins*, 56–60. Summaries of Evagrius' curriculum can be found in many places. David Brakke, "Reading the New Testament and Transforming the Self in Evagrius of Pontus," in *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: The Reception of New Testament Texts in Ancient Ascetic Discourses*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, NTOA 101 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 284–299, esp. 286–287. Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 329–334. Louth, *Origins*, 99–100. Bernard McGinn, "Asceticism and Mysticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford University Press, 1998), 58–74, esp. 65–66. Stewart, "Monastic Pedagogy," 253–256. For what prompted Evagrius to not mention Clement and Origen, see Bunge, "Origenismus," 43. For the impact of Clement on Evagrius' natural contemplation, see Benjamin Ekman, "'Natural Contemplation' in Evagrius Ponticus' *Scholia on Proverbs*," *SP* 95 (2017): 431–439, esp. 436–438.

113 The chapters are succinct statements on spiritual topics, meant for the daily routine of monastic meditation. Evagrius is credited with adapting this philosophical genre to the needs of the ascetic milieu of his time. Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 316–318. Joel Kalvesmaki, "Evagrius in the Byzantine Genre of Chapters," in *Evagrius and His Legacy*, 357–387, esp. 258–263. Stewart, "Monastic Pedagogy," 258–268.

(i.e. no. 28), the rest are recovered from Syriac and Armenian translations. Building on *Monk*, the writing explores, as we see from its opening sections,¹¹⁴ aspects of monastic life that exceed the purview of mere asceticism. These aspects include contemplation, compassion, discernment, and prayer, representing the distinctive qualities and activities of the “gnostic” (γνωστικός), or the saintly teacher.¹¹⁵ Immediately relevant is the gnostic’s aptitude for natural contemplation (φυσική),¹¹⁶ which depends on personal purity more than on anything else. Echoing the Alexandrian antecedents earlier discussed, from Clement to Athanasius, Evagrius’ contemplation is inseparable from the contemplative person.¹¹⁷ Evagrius’ own traditional sources included, however, more than references to his Alexandrian forebears.

Gnostic draws both on the lore of the Egyptian desert and on theologians of several traditions. In so doing, it develops the patristic foundations of *Monk*, whose introductory letter mentions the “sayings of the fathers” and “the teaching of the elders,”¹¹⁸ and which ends by giving several monastic references.¹¹⁹ It is true that most chapters within *Gnostic* do not refer to sources—not even, as one might expect, monastic ones—but towards its end several masters are mentioned by name.¹²⁰ Evagrius must have produced these names in an attempt to legitimise his teaching, a strategy which probably imitates Basil’s, his onetime teacher.¹²¹ In what follows I consider his explicit references, marking their significance for the topic at hand.¹²²

First mentioned are two of his early mentors, “Gregory the righteous” and “the pillar of the truth, Basil the Cappadocian.”¹²³ There is debate regarding

114 The first three chapters state the limited comprehension of a beginner in the practical life, compared to the gnostic’s broader scope and charisms. Cf. *Gnostic* 1–3.

115 For a description of the gnostic’s qualities, competences, and activities, see A. and C. Guillaumont, “Introduction,” 24–40.

116 *Gnostic* 13.

117 A. and C. Guillaumont, “Introduction,” 25–26.

118 *Monk* prologue, 9.52–53. See also the reference to “the holy fathers who currently water me” in *Monk* epilogue, 8–9.

119 *Monk* 91–94. The monastic figures mentioned here by name are Antony and the two Macarii.

120 Costache, “Christian Gnosis,” 264–265. A. and C. Guillaumont, “Introduction,” 42. Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 318.

121 *Spirit* 29.72–74.

122 This part of the “Evagrius” section is based on my paper, “From Natural Contemplation to Saintly Contemplatives: The Evagrius Gnostic and Some Antecedents,” presented for the St Andrew’s Patristic Symposium 2014 whose theme was “From Alexandria to Cappadocia and Back Again” (St Andrew’s Greek Orthodox Theological College, Sydney, 26–27 September 2014).

123 For Gregory: *Gnostic* 44.1–2. A similar reference to Gregory as mentoring Evagrius appears

the identity of Gregory, whether he is “the Theologian” from Nazianzus or the bishop of Nyssa. Recently, Ilaria Ramelli determined that Evagrius means Gregory of Nyssa, whom he considered his true mentor.¹²⁴ This must explain why the name of Gregory, as the younger sibling, precedes Basil’s. By mentioning their names, Evagrius possibly suggests that, while his wisdom is monastic, the sophisticated Cappadocian theology also informs its intellectual articulation. The approach of the Cappadocians illustrates a normative grasp of Origen’s teaching that was represented in the desert, we have seen above, by Antony and his disciples.¹²⁵ After the two Cappadocians, Evagrius lists three local masters, namely, “Athanasius, Egyptians’ holy luminary,”¹²⁶ “Sarapion, the angel of the Church of Thmuis,”¹²⁷ and “Didymus, the great and gnostic teacher.”¹²⁸ He must have genuinely believed in the correspondence of his views to those of his witnesses, but he could have also referred to them, strategically, to earn the approval of his adoptive environment. Of the three, the monastic milieu unreservedly respected the first two, while the intelligentsia—monastic and otherwise—held in high esteem the third author. Didymus was generally acknowledged as Origen’s heir in hermeneutical theology, even though after his death this recognition led to his memory being tarnished.¹²⁹ But the reference to Athanasius and Sarapion constitutes a double strike, so to speak, both being Antony’s ascetic disciples as well as erudite bishops. As disciples of Antony, they are not foreign to Origen’s legacy. In a veiled way, therefore, all five theologians endorse the interest of Evagrius in the Alexandrian intellectual tradition. The shrewdness of the argument put forward through this choice of authors stares one in the face.

Before reviewing Evagrius’ references, it is worth noting that he does not borrow the quoted aphorisms from their works. The modern editors of *Gnostic* discovered that these sayings do not belong to any known writings of his sources.

in *Monk* epilogue, 7–8: “through the prayers and intercessions of Gregory the righteous, who planted me.” For Basil: *Gnostic* 45.1. Nicodemus (*Φιλοκαλία*, 1:39) mentions all three Cappadocian fathers as Evagrius’ guides.

124 Ramelli, “Evagrius Ponticus,” 165–171; *Evagrius’s* Kephalaia gnostika, xi–xx, xvii–viii.

125 Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 13–17. Golitzin, “Controversy over the Divine Body,” 28. Ramelli, “Evagrius Ponticus,” 115–116.

126 *Gnostic* 46.1.

127 *Gnostic* 47.1.

128 *Gnostic* 48.2.

129 Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 122–123, 179–180, 182–183. Robert C. Hill, “Introduction,” in *Didymus the Blind: Commentary on Genesis*, FC 132 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 3–24, esp. 3–4, 10–11, 22. Louth, “The fourth-century Alexandrians,” 280–281. Sheridan, *Language for God*, 115–116.

Consequently, they assumed that apart from drawing on his personal acquaintance with the Cappadocians¹³⁰ and, possibly, with Didymus,¹³¹ he must have quoted from lost works of Athanasius and Sarapion.¹³² These last two died before he reached Egypt. The possibility of his consulting lost works cannot be rejected, but this thesis of the editors is not the only possible explanation. Whether or not Evagrius was aware of writings now lost, his approach matches his ascetic environment. Being deeply immersed in monastic lore—for which the oral transmission of patristic sayings was paramount¹³³—he must have received information from his desert teachers and fellow dwellers. The process of live transmission worked so well that he did not even need to know the five men directly. His drawing upon the desert tradition could be another form of soliciting the support of the Egyptian monks who treasured patristic wisdom. I must now turn to his five references.

Evagrius discussed at some length, within the limited space allowed by his chapters, the views of his Cappadocian mentors.

Gregory's saying correlates the four cardinal virtues, namely, prudence, courage, moderation and justice, and the contemplative endeavours of the gnostics.¹³⁴ Courage empowers them to uphold the truth.¹³⁵ Moderation helps to disentangle what is genuine teaching of the Gospel's first sower, Christ, from what is not.¹³⁶ In turn, prudence enables the contemplative minds to distinguish the things that matter most, the things that are real, from lesser goods, plausible counterfeits and distractions, and to act accordingly. While the gnostics focus upon the "noetic and holy powers" as such—without seeking to

130 A. and C. Guillaumont, "Introduction," 174, 181.

131 A. and C. Guillaumont, "Introduction," 189. Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, xv. Blossom Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, and Commentary: Noetic Exegesis in Origen of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius Ponticus*, ECCA 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 17–18.

132 A. and C. Guillaumont, "Introduction," 184, 187.

133 Krastu Banev, *Theophilus of Alexandria and the First Origenist Controversy: Rhetoric and Power*, OECs (Oxford University Press, 2015), 27–28. Harmless, "Monasticism," 499, 504. Andrew Louth, "The literature of the monastic movement," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 373–381, esp. 380. John Wortley, "Introduction," in *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. J. Wortley (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–7, esp. 4–6. John Wortley, "Introduction," in *The Book of the Elders: Sayings of the Desert Fathers; The Systematic Collection*, trans. J. Wortley, CS 240 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), xiii–xxi, esp. xvi, xix.

134 *Gnostic* 44.1–3.

135 *Gnostic* 44.6–7.

136 *Gnostic* 44.7–9.

find their principles¹³⁷—they must dismisses imaginary things.¹³⁸ Finally, justice instructs the gnostics to share insights with others in proportion to their worthiness and preparedness. Advanced disciples receive the truth in obscure and enigmatic forms, to stir their interest and reflection, while simple people directly, for an immediate benefit.¹³⁹ In short, together with disclosing matters of the advanced experience, the saying highlights the impact of ethical progress upon gnostic tasks such as contemplation and teaching. This saying confirms what we found out already, that personal holiness conditions, facilitates, and disposes to contemplation.

Turning to Basil, Evagrius noted that he drew a line between the *modus operandi* of human and of divine knowledge (γνώσις).¹⁴⁰ Divine knowledge can be attained through illumination, or “God’s grace,”¹⁴¹ in proportion to one’s dispassion (ἀπάθεια) and “righteousness, gentleness, and mercifulness.”¹⁴² Someone who attains divine knowledge perceives the mind’s ethereal light during prayer.¹⁴³ In turn, human knowledge requires “attentive study and sustained training”¹⁴⁴ instead of dispassion.¹⁴⁵ The nexus between the two kinds of knowledge is implicit. The possibility of such a connection resonates with Basil’s polymath training and interdisciplinary method—discussed in Chapter Five—and the portrait of the gnostic in the writing under consideration,

137 The text reads: “to contemplate (τὸ θεωρεῖν) the noetic and holy powers, except for their principles” (*Gnostic* 44.3–4). Their principles, in turn, are accessible to wisdom: “for these [i.e. the principles] are clearly handed on only through wisdom” (*Gnostic* 44.5).

138 Thus, “do not indulge [thinking about] things that do not exist” (*Gnostic* 44.7).

139 *Gnostic* 44.9–13. Cf. *Gnostic* 12, 15, 23, 25. The approach of Evagrius emulated Gregory’s. Gribomont, “Monasticism,” 105. Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 44, 46. A. and C. Guillaumont, “Introduction,” 30–33. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxi, xxxvi, 14. For an analysis of Evagrius’ strategy of concealment in *Gnostic*, see Young, “Evagrius the Iconographer,” 58–61.

140 *Gnostic* 45.2.

141 *Gnostic* 45.3.

142 As the text reads, “only those who are dispassionate are worthy recipients” (*The Gnostic* 45.4,6).

143 *Gnostic* 45.6–8. This is a recurrent Evagrian topic. Cf. *Monk* 64; *Prayer* 74–75 (Φιλοκαλία, 1:155–165); *Thoughts* 39. Sometimes the mind’s own light facilitates perception of Christ’s light (*Thoughts* 14.14–15). Scholars have long addressed this type of experience in Evagrius. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 70–71. Golitzin, “Controversy over the Divine Body,” 30–31. William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 150–153. Julia Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic*, ANCTRTBS (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 77–107.

144 *Gnostic* 45.2–3.

145 The passages speaks of “that which can be received even by those who are impassioned” (*Gnostic* 45.5).

addressed below, which displays analytical and contemplative features. By emphasising dispassion and virtue the passage aligns with the view that personal worthiness and contemplation proper hold together. It also conveys the message that, having its source in divine illumination, true gnosis is irreducible to intellectual pursuits. As we shall soon find out, Evagrius upholds identical views.

The aphorisms attributed to Athanasius and Sarapion, to which I must now turn, are briefer than the previous ones, but by no means dull.

The saying of Athanasius warns the gnostics about evil attacks, exhorting them to discern their origin and to endure trials. Thus, “the gnostics (γνωστικοί) must know who blows against them and valiantly withstand all the tests” of their fortitude.¹⁴⁶ The closing phrase, “with eagerness feed those who present themselves,”¹⁴⁷ makes for an enigmatic metaphor. Within the economy of *Gnostic*, the phrase must mean compassionate teaching as a task for the spiritually advanced.¹⁴⁸ It would then signify that the gnostics—desert elders undoubtedly—should continue to teach despite any personal misfortunes. It follows that “those who present themselves” to receive the food of teaching are monastic disciples. Earlier we have seen Evagrius applying to himself the corresponding metaphor of being watered—or given water to drink—by the fathers who guided him.¹⁴⁹ This interpretation accords with the ascetic literature of the time, which depicts disciples living together with their elders, from whom they received food and training.¹⁵⁰ It also fits Athanasius’ monastic interests, discussed in the first part of this chapter, perhaps even offering a fine summary of his depiction of Antony as a holy man seasoned in spiritual combat and as a teacher to eager novices. The saying might not speak of contemplation directly, but does so implicitly by referring to discernment. It is only as experienced in contemplation and discernment that the gnostics both withstand turmoil and become teachers for whoever wishes to learn.

In turn, Sarapion’s wisdom addresses the impact of the virtues upon the endeavour of the gnostics to tame their nature. “Spiritual knowledge” (πνευματικὴ γνῶσις) purifies their mind thoroughly, love heals their spirited part, while abstinence, finally, controls their unbridled appetite.¹⁵¹ Mind, the spirited

146 *Gnostic* 46.3–4. Cf. Evagrius, *To Eulogius* 6 (PG 79, 1101.17–26); *Monk* 8, 12, 28 etc.

147 μετὰ προθυμίας τοὺς προσιόντας τρεφέτωσαν (*Gnostic* 46.5).

148 A. and C. Guillaumont, “Introduction,” 183–184. In Chapter Three we encountered Origen’s similar stance. Cf. Crouzel, *Origène*, 174–176 and Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens*, 206–207.

149 ποτιζόντων με (“who water me” or “who give me to drink”; *Monk* epilogue, 8–9).

150 See Costache, “Elders and Disciples,” 279–280, 286–287, 288–289 (and the sources quoted therein).

151 *Gnostic* 47.

part, and desire are typical elements for Platonic anthropology.¹⁵² But, here, in clear monastic fashion, the three elements feature together with the virtues which configure them into their ideal form, that is, spiritual knowledge, love, and abstinence. The passage does not refer to the gnostic experience directly, but, again, the context clarifies its meaning. Virtuously transformed, the gnostics are holy persons, gentle, kind, and wise—perfect illustrations of a monastic teacher, “the beautiful elder.”¹⁵³ Relevant is the image of the gnostics as transformed persons who attain “spiritual gnosis,” undoubtedly including by way of contemplative exercises.

Thus, the aphorisms attributed to both Egyptian theologians present the gnostics as monastic elders, personally transformed, insightful, and kind, disposed to offer guidance to those who seek it.

Evagrius’ fifth witness is Didymus. The saying attributed to him is the most relevant of all to my purposes, since it treats natural contemplation explicitly. The passage recommends ongoing reflection upon “the principles of providence and judgment” which permeate the universe and encode its meaning.¹⁵⁴ Evagrius himself often refers to these divine activities, usually seeing judgment as diversifying created things and providence as unifying them.¹⁵⁵ This passage therefore documents the direct influence of Didymus upon him.¹⁵⁶ That said, here, judgment and providence are responsible for creation’s diversity and spiritual progress.¹⁵⁷ At a closer look, the text mentions three different areas: ontology (“the differentiation (διαφορά) of bodies and worlds”), ethics (ἀρετή; “virtue”), and epistemology (γνώσις; “knowledge”).¹⁵⁸ A reader subscribing to

152 Cf. *Phaedrus* 246a–254e. Sarapion’s philosophical inclinations are well documented. Herbel, *Sarapion of Thmuis*, 29, 32, 34, 53, 62.

153 See a related description of the gnostic teacher in *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Theodora 5 (PG 65, 204A).

154 “Always exercise within yourself the principles pertaining to providence and judgment (τοὺς περὶ προνοίας καὶ κρίσεως λόγους) ... and put these matters to test, for almost all people stumble because of them” (*Gnostic* 48.3–4).

155 *Chapters* 1.27; 4.89; 5.4; 5.7; 5.16; 5.23; 6.43; 6.59; 6.75; 6.76; *Monasteries* 132, 135 (text in Sinkewicz’ *Evagrius of Pontus*). See Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 292–294. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 55–56. Ramelli, *Evagrius’s Kephalaia gnostika*, lii, lx–ii, lxxvii, lxxxi–vi. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxxvi–viii, 120–121, 135, 255, 263, 265, 266.

156 Evagrius iterated the same idea in *Chapters* 6.59.

157 As the text reads, “you shall find the principles of judgment (τοὺς περὶ κρίσεως λόγους) in the diversity of bodies and worlds, while those of providence (τοὺς περὶ προνοίας) in the ways in which (believers) are led from evil and ignorance to virtue and knowledge” (*Gnostic* 48.4–7).

158 *Gnostic* 48.5,7.

Aristotle's view that ontology and ethics are separate¹⁵⁹ would find this passage perplexing. Elsewhere, Evagrius himself echoes the classical distinction, clarifying that virtue and gnosis are not natural givens.¹⁶⁰ That said, in the passage under consideration the nexus between ontology and ethics is implicit, having to do with the equally implicit notion of the ascetically sharpened discernment, which both fields presuppose. One could not perceive the "diversity of bodies and worlds" without a keen eye, without discerning things for what they are. Discernment, also, identifies the workings of judgment and providence in the world. It is discernment, moreover, which enables the gnostic to understand reality ("knowledge") and to advance spiritually ("virtue"). Ontology and ethics cross paths, finally, in that the gnostic who discerns reality and progresses spiritually has God as a goal, in whom all of his or her undertakings converge.¹⁶¹ It is not important whether the idea of this nexus belongs to Didymus or Evagrius. Relevant is that it is consistent with the point made throughout Chapter Three and here, namely, the gnostic pursuit of ethical and spiritual advancement facilitates contemplation of the natural world. This conclusion accords with the message of Evagrius' five patristic witnesses, that the gnostic experience entails two intertwined dimensions, transformative and intellectual.

We shall soon discover that, by and large, the views of Evagrius correspond to his sources. *Gnostic*, undoubtedly, presents his way of articulating desert spirituality from the vantage point of his five authorities.¹⁶² I must now turn to his portrait of the gnostic.

2.2 *Insightfulness and Generosity*

The above patristic witnesses present the gnostics as ascetically transformed and enlightened persons, discerning, generous, and loving, guiding others by spiritual counsel. Evagrius himself subscribes to this understanding. That this is so transpires through *Gnostic's* initial chapters, where he compares the spiritually advanced and the mere ascetics. This comparison brings to the fore Evagrius' actual topic, namely, the gnostics and their uncommon experience.

159 Aristotle refused to blur the line between virtue and nature: "whereas by nature we are endowed with abilities, we do not become either good or evil by nature" (*The Nicomachean Ethics* 2.5; 1106a.9–10).

160 *Thoughts* 41.11–13. Without spiritual progress, the human being possesses neither virtue nor advanced knowledge.

161 This, precisely, is the meaning of *Thoughts* 41.11–13.

162 Gribomont, "Monasticism," 105, reached the same conclusion.

There is a great difference between “practical” monks (*praktikoi*) and gnostics (*gnostikoi*). “Ascetic monks perceive the principles of ascesis (λόγους πρακτικούς), but the gnostics will see gnostic things (γνωστικά).”¹⁶³ While simple ascetics concern themselves with the prescriptions of everyday praxis, following rules, the advanced possess spiritual insight, grasping the purposes they serve. To paraphrase Asimov, simple ascetics have the knowledge, but not the understanding.¹⁶⁴ Understanding is the mark of the gnostics and what enables them to teach. As Evagrius prompts the gnostic aspirant: “understand (γνώριζε) the principles and the laws (τοὺς λόγους καὶ τοὺς νόμους) pertaining to opportunities, lifestyles, and pursuits, so that you can readily advise each person what is profitable.”¹⁶⁵ Contemplation therefore has pastoral outcomes, especially for spiritual guidance and monastic pedagogy. William Harmless identified these outcomes as the heart of Evagrius’ discourse.¹⁶⁶ But what matters is that insights into the principles of things equip the gnostics with answers appropriate to the traits, habits, and needs of others. These insights also determine the manner of how the gnostics teach. As we read elsewhere, “the gnostics present the discourse as salt to the impure and as light to the pure.”¹⁶⁷ This seems to be an echo of Clement’s concealment strategy, earlier mentioned.

Insightful contemplation—including of nature—is central to the gnostic experience, while the spiritually immature content themselves with observing rules and performing tasks. This difference has further ramifications. Ascetic persons focus on monitoring and moderating their sinful drives.¹⁶⁸ In turn, the gnostics—having mastered their own self¹⁶⁹—also lead others to healing and enlightenment.¹⁷⁰ The gnostics are neither selfish nor isolated from people.

163 *Gnostic* 1. Cf. *Gnostic* 25. In *Gnostic* 13 he mentions “monks and worldly people,” all in need of gnostic guidance. For a detailed discussion of these differences, see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 346–354. For an overview of what Evagrius means by “practical” monks, see Guillaumont, “Étude,” 38–63.

164 Asimov, *Forward the Foundation* (London: Bantam Books, 1994), 33, 36.

165 *Gnostic* 15. Cf. *Gnostic* 17. For a detailed analysis of the gnostics as teachers, see Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 307–335.

166 Harmless, *Mystics*, 142.

167 *Gnostic* 3. The sentence glosses on Matt 5:13–16. See on this difference A. and C. Guillaumont, “Introduction,” 26. *Gnostic* 14 gives an example of casting light on the pure.

168 “Ascetics are those who only procure dispassion for the passionate side of their soul” (*Gnostic* 2).

169 *Gnostic* 8; 32; 38; *Thoughts* 19; 40; *Chapters* 6.34. See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxxiv–xxxv.

170 *Gnostic* 3; 31; 33.

They minister to their fellow human beings, especially when they are afflicted by ignorance.¹⁷¹ This happens although they do not seek company.¹⁷²

Evagrius returned to this topic by clarifying that ministering to others and insightfulness are deeply connected. The simple ascetics, unaware of the principles of things, have also no concern for the salvation of others.¹⁷³ Ignorance goes hand in hand with religious rigidity and with insensitivity to people. Conversely, knowledge and insight both qualify and prompt the gnostics to guide people spiritually. And as the gnostics advance in contemplation, they become increasingly malleable, approachable, and generous.¹⁷⁴ They give alms,¹⁷⁵ heal,¹⁷⁶ and provide sound teaching to all.¹⁷⁷ The latter is the hallmark of gnostic activity and what completes generosity in its practical sense. As we read,

It is appropriate to teach both monastics and worldly people about the correct way of life (περί πολιτείας ὀρθῆς), and to partially clarify for them those concerning natural and theological notions (φυσικῆς ἢ θεολογικῆς δόγματα), without which there is no way of seeing the Lord.¹⁷⁸

What guides the teaching career of the gnostics is the curriculum, which, in turn, constitutes the very content of the teaching. Sound teaching refers to the curricular steps of personal transformation (πρακτική), contemplation (φυσική), and divine vision (θεολογική).¹⁷⁹

¹⁷¹ *Gnostic* 7; 10; 32; 36.3.

¹⁷² *Gnostic* 11.

¹⁷³ τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀγνοοῦντός ἐστι τοὺς λόγους τῶν γινομένων· τὸ δὲ μὴ βουλομένου πάντας ἀνθρώπους σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν ("neither does he know the principles of things created nor does he desire that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth"; *Gnostic* 22.2–4).

¹⁷⁴ Δεῖ δὲ μὴ σκυθρωπὸν εἶναι τὸν γνωστικὸν μηδὲ δυσπρόσιτον ("the gnostic must be neither severe nor inaccessible"; *Gnostic* 22.1–2). See Guillaumont's editorial notes on the words *ni sombre ni d'un abord difficile* (SC 356, 124).

¹⁷⁵ *Gnostic* 7. The original Greek of this chapter is lost.

¹⁷⁶ *Gnostic* 33.1–2.

¹⁷⁷ *Gnostic* 22.2–4. This chapter relates to what Evagrius later conveys about the insights of Athanasius into gnostic generosity (*Gnostic* 46.5). See Young, "Evagrius the Iconographer," 61–68. For the teaching calling of the gnostic, see A. and C. Guillaumont, "Introduction," 26–28.

¹⁷⁸ *Gnostic* 13. Cf. *Gnostic* 12.

¹⁷⁹ The three stages of the curriculum appear already in *Monk* 1, possibly as a warning against the complacency of those who understand monastic life as solely focused on asceticism. Elsewhere, Evagrius expresses the view that all people can progress in virtue and contemplation (*Chapters* 6.15). This clarification should be seen as an important prerequisite for

These insights into the gnostic profile serve as a necessary backdrop for the topic of contemplation, to which I must now turn. We already know that this activity, precisely, is what makes the gnostics competent teachers in regards to representing reality and discerning the meaning of things.

2.3 *A Methodological Intermission*

While they are known as generous persons and as competent teachers, the main goal of the gnostics is to make sense of things—to seek the truth about the universe, the divine activities within it, and the principles of things created.¹⁸⁰ Christ himself empowers them to practice “the contemplation of all the ages” of the creation, by which the soul is resurrected.¹⁸¹ This stance echoes Clement’s view that the Lord initiated his disciples into what the beings are, have been, and will be.¹⁸² But the task of contemplating reality—mirroring the calling to perfection discussed in *Chapters* 6.15, earlier mentioned—corresponds to an innate given and should not be construed as the sole province of the gnostics. In Chapter Three we discovered Clement and Origen’s view that people are contemplative beings. Evagrius likewise believes that rational beings are created for more than simple existence; they must *know*.¹⁸³ They are endowed with the “rational aptitude” (λογιστικόν) necessary “for the apprehension of the created beings (τῶν γεγονότων) through contemplation (τῇ θεωρίᾳ).”¹⁸⁴ Gnostic undertakings, therefore, are the normal activity of rational beings. Most people, however, bound as they are by their passions, cannot contemplate reality, as Benjamin Ekman recently pointed out.¹⁸⁵

Only the gnostics—who do not easily succumb to sinful drives—access the principles of corporeal and incorporeal realities through contemplation.¹⁸⁶ It is

the teaching ministry of the gnostics. Indeed, if people cannot progress, teaching them is pointless.

180 *Gnostic* 4.1–4; 22.2–4; 25; 40; 48.4–7; 49. See Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 48–49. Against this backdrop, it is difficult to understand Golitzin’s view that the Evagian hierarchical world does not disclose its divine principles. See Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 327 (at 332, however, he maintains the contrary view).

181 *Thoughts* 38.1–2. For further Evagian distinctions, see Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 50–51. For Evagrius’ notion of ages, see Ramelli, *Evagrius’s Kephalaia gnostika*, lix–lxiv.

182 *Stromateis* 6.9.78.5–6.

183 *Chapters* 1.89. I am grateful to David Runia who in a personal communication alerted me that this stance echoes the opening sentence of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

184 *Monk* 86.3–4. For the natural affinity between the mind and the contemplated objects, see Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 54–55.

185 Ekman, “Natural Contemplation,” 432. Cf. Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *J ECS* 9:2 (2001): 173–204, esp. 177–178.

186 *Gnostic* 25; *Thoughts* 19; *Monasteries* 133; *Prayer* 53.

thus, contemplatively, that they acquire knowledge, even though they might be yet to reach perfection. For the gnostics can occasionally be impatient, unjust, or tempted by vanity.¹⁸⁷ As such, they are not entirely free of mistakes,¹⁸⁸ and sometimes misrepresent things.¹⁸⁹ For example,

The temptation of the gnostics is to present to the mind a false opinion (ὑπόληψις ψευδής) about existent things as inexistent, about things inexistent as existent, and about those which exist as being otherwise than they are made.¹⁹⁰

Reality, therefore, is not easy to grasp even for the advanced. Assumptions and presuppositions, which draw on residual habits from earlier in life,¹⁹¹ still confuse the mind which has not yet sufficiently tested the accuracy of the data. Indeed, and echoing Platonic stances,¹⁹² Evagrius believed that the passions cloud one's mind.

Because of all this the gnostics must keep practicing purification, especially by controlling anger¹⁹³ and observing "right behaviour."¹⁹⁴ Philosophical, or meditative, exercises are integral to their ongoing renewal.¹⁹⁵ Such ascetic requirements are not merely prophylactic. They also catalyse transformation and facilitate advancement in gnosis.¹⁹⁶ The relation between asceticism and gnosis is not simple, however: acquired knowledge incites the advanced to change further, to progress towards higher knowledge and perfection.¹⁹⁷ As Asimov

187 *Gnostic* 8; 24. See Stewart, "Monastic Pedagogy," 255.

188 *Gnostic* 23.

189 *Gnostic* 43.

190 *Gnostic* 42. This chapter anticipates the outline of Gregory's corresponding views (*Gnostic* 44.7).

191 *Gnostic* 43; *Thoughts* 40; *Prayer* 57. See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxv.

192 For a discussion about Plato's and Philo's views, see Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 259–262.

193 *Monk* 78; *Gnostic* 5, 37, 47. Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 329–332. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 140–143. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxix, xxxii, xxxv. A.N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 218–219.

194 πολιτεία ὁρθή (*Gnostic* 13.2–3). Cf. *Gnostic* 44.1–3. See Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 66–69 and Neil et al., *Dreams*, 59–62.

195 Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 184–194. Jonathan Zecher, "Death among the Desert Fathers: Evagrius and Theophilus in the *Sayings* Tradition," *Sobornost* (Mar. 2014): 148–169, esp. 162–167.

196 *Gnostic* 29. See Ekman, "Natural Contemplation," 432–433 and Williams, *The Divine Sense*, 211–212, 223–225, 228–229.

197 "When it is consistently pursued, gnosis teaches the one who partakes of it both how it should be guarded and how it should be brought to further increase (ἐπὶ μείζονα)" (*Gnostic* 9). Earlier we saw that even the diligent students share in this aspiration (*Gnostic* 29).

would say, “every change, any change, has a myriad of side effects.”¹⁹⁸ In this case, personal change and gnosis fuel each other with bursts of energy.

By affirming the necessity of “right behaviour” for spiritual and intellectual progress, *Gnostic* concurs with *Monk*, which presents a string of virtues leading to dispassion and love, and then to natural and divine knowledge.¹⁹⁹ References to the connection between ethics, theory, and gnosis in fact permeate the corpus.²⁰⁰ An interesting chapter in the writing under consideration,²⁰¹ lost in its original, discusses the unbreakable bond between ethics and natural contemplation. The passage refers to the scriptural practice of mingling ethical and physical senses, asserting that an attentive reader will be able to find ethical implications in statements about nature and, likewise, natural nuances within ethical contexts. As such, this chapter confirms my earlier interpretation of *Gnostic* 48, where the link is only implicit. Important is that the gnostics cultivate both virtue and contemplation. This is another way of saying that natural contemplation depends on one’s spiritual advancement. As with his Alexandrian predecessors, Evagrius does not separate contemplation from the contemplative person. His discourse on natural contemplation is ultimately a discourse on the contemplative gnostic—what David Bradford calls “the subject-object relationship.”²⁰² Not at all unexpected, usually this connection appears under the curricular guise of asceticism, physics, and theology.²⁰³ On this note, I turn to the mechanics and the aims of knowledge.

Ethical accomplishments are not all that makes the gnostic. He or she possesses both divine and human knowledge, to paraphrase Basil’s words discussed above²⁰⁴—or, as Evagrius preferred, external knowledge (ἐξωθεν) and

198 Asimov, *Forward the Foundation*, 35.

199 “Faith, my children, strengthens the fear of God, while this (strengthens) abstinence, and this (i.e. abstinence) unwavering obedience and hope, which give birth to dispassion, which in turn engenders love. And love is the door towards natural knowledge (θύρα γνώσεως φυσικῆς), followed by the knowledge of God (θεολογία) and the ultimate blessedness (ἡ ἐσχάτη μακαριότης)” (*Monk*, prologue, 8.47–51). For notes on this passage, see Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 139–140. We saw above that Evagrius quotes Sarapion in support of this view (*Gnostic* 47). For related observations, see Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 267–277 and Linge, “Leading the Life of Angels,” 565.

200 *Gnostic* 6; *Monk* 84; *Thoughts* 14.10–15; 19.38–43; 40.1–7; *Prayer* prologue; 52; *Chapters* 4.70; 5.12. See Bradford, “Evagrius Ponticus,” 113–115. Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 279–283. Linge, “Leading the Life of Angels,” 558, 563–564.

201 *Gnostic* 20. See on this Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 162.

202 Bradford, “Evagrius Ponticus,” 113. Cf. Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, and Commentary*, 248.

203 *Gnostic* 12–13, 18, 20, 49. Cf. *Monk* prologue, 8.53–58; 1; *Prayer* prologue.

204 *Gnostic* 45.

that which comes through divine grace (ἐκ Θεοῦ χάριτος). Together with describing both forms of knowledge, the following passage discloses further traits of the gnostic profile.

The knowledge that comes to us from foreign sources demands that the matters at hand be demonstrated in regards to their presuppositions.²⁰⁵ In turn, that which God's grace engenders presents things to one's own eyes through the intellective aptitude; and so, the mind, on seeing them, accepts their principles.²⁰⁶

The two forms of gnosis differ in terms of their source and how they treat the data. External knowledge, borrowed from foreign sources, requires that information be put to the test in order to identify its presuppositions or principles, *logoi*, while the graciously provided gnosis presents them directly, by illuminating the mind. And since God who reveals the principles to the mind is also their source, graciously authenticated knowledge—the highest form of theology—is secure.²⁰⁷ In turn, external knowledge, doubtlessly acquired through the available sciences and other disciplines, needs testing and processing.

This does not mean that Evagrius' natural contemplation, as Blowers asserted, "concedes only relative value to perspectives from secular science."²⁰⁸ *Gnostic 4* does not pass judgment on the validity of external, or scientific, knowledge; it merely describes its workings. It is true that understanding the cosmos is not Evagrius' ultimate goal and that for him, accordingly, scientific knowledge could not exhaust reality. Corresponding to Clement and Origen's views, knowing the cosmos is for him another way of reaching divine knowledge.²⁰⁹ But, matching the cosmology of the earlier theologians, Evagrius' own system of the world does not unfold in one direction, from the visible to the invisible. Typical of his approach, in *Letter* he points out that the visible and the invisible sides of the creation are inextricably linked, each signify-

²⁰⁵ The plural λόγων can mean many things, but the context about knowledge borrowed from the broader cultural context warrants its translation by "presuppositions" or "principles."

²⁰⁶ Ἡ μὲν ἔξωθεν ἡμῖν συμβαίνουσα γνώσις, διὰ τῶν λόγων ὑποδεικνύειν πειράται τὰς ὕλας· ἡ δὲ ἐκ Θεοῦ χάριτος ἐγγινομένη, αὐτοψεῖ τῇ διανοίᾳ παρίστησι τὰ πράγματα, πρὸς ἃ βλέπων ὁ νοῦς, τοὺς αὐτῶν λόγους προσίεται (*Gnostic 4.1–4*).

²⁰⁷ See e.g. *Chapters* 1.12; 1.19 and their analysis in Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, 15, 20–21.

²⁰⁸ Blowers, "Contemplation of Nature," 162; *Drama*, 331. Corrigan (*Evagrius and Gregory*, 118), too, referred to Evagrius' prudence in regards to external knowledge given his prioritising divine knowledge.

²⁰⁹ *Monk* 32.6–7. See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxxv.

ing the other.²¹⁰ And while in Clement the same view takes the form of the method, Origen articulated the relationship between visible and invisible in terms which anticipate Evagrius' own. What matters is that for both Clement and Origen, as we have seen in Chapter Three, the connection between the visible and invisible entails integrating scientific awareness and theological insight. This must also be the case for Evagrius.

True, he might not have been a realist at heart. Nevertheless, as Kevin Corrigan and others discovered, for the purposes of exploring the natural world Evagrius observed a rigorous scientific method.²¹¹ This evidence—overlapping with the argument Gabriel Bunge and Ramelli put forward in support of Evagrius' sense of the goodness of creation²¹²—weakens the case against his interest in the physical world and the natural sciences. External knowledge remains integral to the gnostic quest. The use of Aristotelian categories, later in the writing, confirms it,²¹³ and so too do the eclectic sources Julia Konstantinovskiy identified in the background of Evagrius' *logoi*.²¹⁴ It goes the same for his number symbolism.²¹⁵ Last but not least, Evagrius' approach presents Platonic features both in regards to the form of the cosmos and the contemplative method required by the task of grasping reality.²¹⁶ Against this backdrop, *Gnostic 4* does not dismiss external knowledge in favour of the divine one. Divine gnosis, or theology, does not exclude other ways of knowing. Theology and science support each other. After all, as the excerpt says plainly, what both study and gracious insight communicate are the principles of existent things. And given that scientific knowledge and gracious illumination examine the same reality, the gnostics—who are theologically trained and scientifically aware persons—perceive it through both lenses. The traits of Clement's Abraham are also the traits of Evagrius' gnostic.

The broader chapter, of which the above passage is a part, returns to the point that ethics and cognition presuppose and sustain each other. Purification and virtue boost the intellective aptitude, facilitating the acquisition of gnosis,

210 Letter 12. Maximus the Confessor borrowed this Evagian stance in his *Mystagogy* 2.

211 Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 120–121. External, or scientific, knowledge remains integral to what Evagrius calls “second natural contemplation,” or understanding the visible world (*Chapters* 2.3; 2.4; 2.20; 3.33; 3.67; 5.32). See Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 284–289 and Young, “Evagrius the Iconographer,” 68–70. For samples of this method, see *Letter* 35–45; *Chapters* 5.51; 5.63.

212 Bunge, “Origenismus,” 33. Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, lxx–lxxvii.

213 *Gnostic* 41.1–2.

214 Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 51–54.

215 See Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 339–341.

216 Linge, “Leading the Life of Angels,” 542–545.

while knowledge itself feeds back into the ethical life. This is what the end of the chapter appears to suggest when it addresses the opposite passions of both forms of knowledge, namely, deception, impulsiveness, and anger.²¹⁷ If these passions and other such things are the contraries of both human and divine gnosis, then gnosis of both kinds must be their antidote. Whether divinely or humanly acquired, i.e. by grace or through study, knowledge of the *logoi* helps the gnostics to reach dispassion as much as virtue supports contemplative endeavours.²¹⁸

Equipped with external knowledge, the gnostics exercise their analytical aptitude in order to grasp the world's mysteries. It is thus that they examine the hidden *logoi* of created things, which make for the object of what Evagrius calls the "first natural contemplation."²¹⁹ Knowing the cosmos might be a stepping-stone for knowing God, but, *pace* Luke Dysinger, this step is as significant for the gnostic experience as knowing the person's inner world.²²⁰ Evagrius' position corresponds to the views of Athanasius, who, we have seen earlier in this chapter, recommends both introspection and natural contemplation as methods for seeking the divine. What matters for now is that external knowledge—pertinent to the exploration of the cosmos—holds its importance.²²¹ The passage here considered might not clarify the meaning of external knowledge, but *Gnostic* offers important nuances elsewhere. Primarily, and as I have already suggested, external knowledge coincides with scientific knowledge. Other connotations are also implied. I propose that external knowledge refers to the indirect grasp of things, regardless of the means, scientific, scriptural, or otherwise. In this, it differs from gracious illumination, which is direct. If my perception is correct, Evagrius put a different spin on the established patristic view of external knowledge as derived from the classical sources. It seems that this, precisely, is what the passage analysed just below has to say.

217 As the text reads, "antithetical to the first is deception, whereas to the second impulsiveness and anger, and whatever else follows" (*Gnostic* 4.4–6). This point corresponds to the one made in *Gnostic* 15, earlier discussed.

218 For natural contemplation as a therapeutic means which enhances purification, see Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 148–149.

219 *Chapters* 2.3; 3.33; 3.67; 5.32. See Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 289–292. For the significance of the principles in Evagrian natural contemplation, see Blowers, "Contemplation of Nature," 163–164; *Drama*, 210–211. The Evagrian understanding of the principles corresponds to Antony's "natural law." See Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 73–74.

220 Dysinger, "An Exegetical Way of Seeing," 32–37. In *Gnostic* 49, to make sense of created reality is a goal in itself. Taking his cue from similar passages, however, elsewhere Dysinger (*Psalmody and Prayer*, 173–175) acknowledged that Evagrius' natural contemplation focuses upon the cosmos.

221 See Casiday, *Evagrius*, 38.

As we find out from another chapter whose original is lost, *Gnostic* 18,²²² an important task is to discern the nature of things. One way in which this is done is by way of scriptural interpretation and by considering the input of other disciplines. According to the chapter in question, the gnostics consider the main scriptural senses—literal and allegorical—seeking to determine to what curricular aspect they refer. In the terms of *Gnostic* 4, this amounts to “demonstrating their presuppositions,” an operation typical for external knowledge. Concerning the allegorical level, some scriptural passages regard the practical life, others natural contemplation, and yet others theological issues. This reminds us of Origen’s threefold interpretation of the creation narrative in *Homily*, analysed in Chapter Three. But *Gnostic* 18 provides a clarification which, as I mentioned there, Origen did not make plain, namely, that the threefold meaning refers to the allegorical level of the text. Now, upon discovering passages that refer to physics, the Evagrian gnostics must identify the natural laws they imply. As scriptural analysis makes recourse to disciplinary tools, to decipher nature’s mysteries encoded within the texts the gnostics need scientific awareness.

Understood in this manner, while at a first glance *Gnostic* 18 discusses textual interpretation, its message is double: Scripture casts theological light upon the creation, while scientific knowledge elucidates the physical matters recorded by the narratives.²²³ Blowers was right to emphasise about other passages²²⁴ that Evagrius considers both Scripture and the cosmos together through the same hermeneutical lens. One might justifiably infer that, by looking at “the world in the mirror of Holy Scripture,” to borrow the other phrase of Blowers, Evagrius construes the cosmos as “another scripture.”²²⁵ Immediately relevant is the use of external knowledge—the laws of physics together with scriptural wisdom—for contemplation. The conclusion that scriptural interpreta-

222 For brief analyses of this passage, see Bradford, “Evagrius Ponticus,” 122; Brakke, “Reading,” 289–290; Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus,” 76, 89. Ekman (“Natural Contemplation,” 433–434) discovered a similar approach in Evagrius’ *Scholia on Proverbs* 1–5.

223 *Gnostic* 20 provides further examples of complex interactions between the three levels of the curriculum in their scriptural application. To decipher these cases requires great familiarity with Scripture (*Gnostic* 19).

224 Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 164.

225 See Blowers, “The World in the Mirror of Holy Scripture,” 409. His considerations about Maximus, the distant disciple of Evagrius, apply very well to the master himself. For similar observations about Evagrius’ “noetic exegesis” of the cosmos as scripture, see Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 56–57 and Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, and Commentary*, 261–265. In turn, A. and C. Guillemon, “Introduction,” 29–30, mentioned cosmic contemplation and scriptural interpretation as unrelated activities.

tion aided by the disciplines is also external knowledge might be troubling, but what matters is that Evagrius' gnostic is a polymath, after the fashion of Clement's "holy gnostic."²²⁶

In this light, the significance of *Gnostic* 4 becomes clearer. It is not only about discerning two kinds of knowledge, gracious and external. It is about determining their respective competencies and the manner of their cooperation. Thus, their cooperation must observe the pattern suggested in *Gnostic* 18, where scriptural wisdom and scientific analysis converge towards deciphering nature's mysteries. Scientific training combined with scriptural awareness equip the gnostics for analysis of cosmic diversity, while graciously induced knowledge facilitates theological understanding. If my reconstruction is correct, then Evagrius' gnostics meet the criteria of the familiar patristic paradigm. We already know that they resemble Clement's holy sage, ascetic, contemplative, and variously trained. They echo the prophetic charisma of Origen's teacher of mysteries. Emulating Athanasian Antony, they are ascetics interested in natural contemplation. They are also able, like Basil's Moses, to combine tools pertaining to various fields.²²⁷

This reconstruction, however, does more than confirm the traditional outlook of the gnostic. It gives us an idea of how natural contemplation unfolds. Specifically, the purified gnostics move from analysis to interpretation to mystical vision—or from science to Scripture to grace. Scientific expertise comes to the fore in the analytical stage, by describing things and searching their natural principles.²²⁸ Scripture offers precious insights in the interpretative stage, where it unveils the theological and the ethical meaning of creation's natural principles.²²⁹ Finally, divine grace provides a superior grasp of reality in the mystical stage, by viewing the cosmos through the creator's eyes²³⁰ and through transfigured senses.²³¹ This triple structure marks another debt to Clement's curricular approach, as well as Athanasius' iteration of the same approach.

226 See Robin Darling Young, "Moses as the First Priest-Gnostikos in the Works of Evagrius of Pontus," in *Jewish Roots*, 202–225, esp. 206.

227 For more on this, see Chapter Five below. Evagrius was no stranger to this view of Moses. See Young, "Moses," 209–210, 223–225.

228 *Gnostic* 4.1–2; 18; 41.1–2. Golitzin (*Et Introibo*, 332–334) and Lollar (*Contemplation of Nature*, 137–154) missed the analytical stage and the significance of the manifold training for the gnostic quest. This oversight is consistent with what other scholars, as discussed above, consider Evagrius' lack of enthusiasm for the sciences.

229 *Gnostic* 18.

230 *Gnostic* 4.3–4.

231 Parrinello, "Da Origene a Simeone," 1127–1128. Stewart, "Imageless Prayer," 191–195.

The importance of transfigured senses—the hallmark of purified persons—resonates well with the earlier Alexandrian fathers.

Scholars have long established that, equipped in this manner, through natural contemplation Evagrius' gnostics attain a rigorous and solid understanding of reality, where all things cohere.²³² Rigorous does not mean entirely free of error,²³³ but it denotes their grasp of the world, better and fuller, compared to simple believers.²³⁴ And since the gnostics understand the principles of things, they discern connections where other people merely see differences and scattered information.²³⁵ The closest analogue for this grasp of reality is the angelic one.²³⁶ It is this superior insight that enables the gnostics to instruct other people in matters of physics and theology.²³⁷

This superior grasp of reality does not mean complete knowledge either; in various degrees, certain objects evade comprehension. And as created beings contain more than one principle, not every contemplative person is able to access all the principles.²³⁸ Even so, while gnosis, being about the natural and the theological matters,²³⁹ is to know both the creator and the created, the creator as well as the ultimate principle of the universe elude analysis. We discovered earlier that the gnostics perceive the particular principles of things, which are not the same as the most comprehensive and ultimate principle of the creation. A certain understanding of the world is possible therefore—and external knowledge is instrumental to that end—but it falls short of a complete grasp. Reality's fundamental pattern remains veiled to the mind. Only Christ, being its source, knows the primary principle of reality.²⁴⁰ This is the same apophaticism of creation we encountered in Clement and in Origen. But while the cosmos can indeed be partially understood and defined, God transcends all intellection. We are warned against trying to define the divine; definitions belong with created and composite things. In turn, "nothing that is being said

232 Brakke, "Reading," 297. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 47. Linge, "Leading the Life of Angels," 547.

233 *Gnostic* 23; 42; 43.

234 *Gnostic* 4.4–6; 15.1–2. Cf. *Chapters* 1.32; 2.36.

235 *Gnostic* 48.3–7.

236 *Gnostic* 40.

237 *Gnostic* 13.

238 *Gnostic* 16; 40.

239 τῆς φυσικῆς ἢ θεολογικῆς δόγματα ("the notions of either physics or theology"; *Gnostic* 13.2).

240 *Gnostic* 40. This position corresponds to Clement's in *Exhortation* 6.69.2. There is a difference, however. While elsewhere Clement points out that Christ shares this knowledge with the gnostic (*Stromateis* 6.7.61.1), Evagrius' stance is less optimistic. His reservations also transpire through *Letter* 18–19. See also Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 159–160.

in relation to the Holy Trinity is appropriate. The ineffable should be revered silently.”²⁴¹ The logical and the ontological categories applicable to the universe have no competence here, and it goes the same for dialectic.²⁴² Contemplation of the natural world, either in its second form or in its first one, points towards the divine cause without being able to encompass it. One reason this is so is because God transcends the creation. Another reason is, however, the fact that natural contemplation relies on external knowledge. Apart from this caveat, external knowledge is not entirely useless when it comes to divine knowledge. Since it operates in the process of natural contemplation (φυσικὴ θεωρία) and since natural contemplation paves the way for theological vision (θεολογική),²⁴³ indirectly external knowledge affects theology.

Evagrius mentions five levels of contemplation. The highest is the Trinity’s, followed by the contemplation of the invisible and the visible realities, then by the divine activities of judgment and providence within the universe.²⁴⁴ External knowledge is more useful on some levels than others. It is apt, for example, for contemplating the principles of the visible creation, the function of which is actually complex. Lollar noted that the principles are both objects of contemplation, which facilitate comprehension of the creation, and pointers to God, the source of all things.²⁴⁵ His assessment, referring to Evagrius’ *Scholia on Ecclesiastes*, holds good here too. What matters is that the gnostic comprehends reality by tapping the divine principles of things. That this is so transpires through a passage from the first part of the triptych, *Monk*:

One of the sages of that time came to righteous Antony, asking, “Father, how do you endure to be deprived of the consolation of books?” But he answered, “Lover of wisdom, my book is the nature of created beings (τὸ ἐμὸν βιβλίον, φιλόσοφε, ἡ φύσις τῶν γεγονότων ἐστὶ) and it is in it that I wish to read about God’s principles (λόγους ἀναγινώσκειν τοῦ Θεοῦ).”²⁴⁶

241 *Gnostic* 41.3–4. This apophatic stance is consistent with Evagrius’ emphasis on “imageless” visions. See Stewart, “Imageless Prayer,” 190–191.

242 *Gnostic* 41.1–2; *Chapters* 4.90. See Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 63 and Williams, *The Divine Sense*, 205–206.

243 *Monk* 84.1–2.

244 *Chapters* 1.27. See Ekman, “Natural Contemplation,” 431–432 and Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 48.

245 Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 146. For similar views, see Dysinger, “An Exegetical Way of Seeing,” 45–46 and Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 332.

246 *Monk* 92. Given the context which refers to the contemplation of nature, λόγοι (lit. “words” when it is about books) demands translation by “principles” (the principles of beings).

As with Athanasius, Evagrius' supreme illustration of a saintly and contemplative gnostic is Antony. This anecdote complements the lengthy Athanasian narrative of Antony's many encounters with pagan philosophers.²⁴⁷ The biographer has Antony stating on one occasion, similarly, that he "trusts God, recognising through his creations (διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων αὐτοῦ) the providence that takes care of all (τὴν εἰς πάντα πρόνοιαν)."²⁴⁸ The above passage seems to represent a variation of this statement. It brings to the fore Antony's conviction that the created world bears theological truth; that the cosmos is "another scripture." We know that, corresponding to Athanasian Antony's beliefs, Evagrius himself is concerned to explore divine providence. Very significant for my purposes here, the above passage also refers to Antony's training, which must have contributed to his attaining the gnostic perception of reality. And while the *vita* has the hermit claiming a lack of erudition,²⁴⁹ Evagrius' account tells a different story. The interlocutor is aware of the hermit's education, scholarship, and interests! Wouldn't Antony miss his books? Under this indirect light, Evagian Antony is the typical gnostic, holy, insightful, and literate. One might legitimately surmise that his contemplation of principles put to good use all the skills he had acquired, from external knowledge to divine insight. This parallel demands that Athanasian Antony's claim of unfamiliarity with the disciplines be taken as a rhetorical device, not as literal truth.

Apart from this difference, the two accounts agree in acknowledging Antony's interest in natural contemplation, or in reading the cosmic book as "another scripture."²⁵⁰ The letters of this book are the divine principles hidden within the created things. This stance echoes Athanasius' view of reading letters and words within the cosmos,²⁵¹ together with his syntactic representation of the ordered universe. The same stance reappears in Evagrius' *Great Letter*, where, in order to explain how God speaks through the creation, the universe is likened to an epistle about the divine power and wisdom.²⁵² It emerges

247 *Life* 72–80. For brief references to this passage, see Stewart, "Monastic Attitudes," 324–325 and Williams, *The Divine Sense*, 204.

248 *Life* 78.1.5–7.

249 ἡμεῖς μὴ μαθόντες γράμματα ("we do not learn the disciplines"; *Life* 78.1.5). Here, Athanasius adopted a Christian literary trope in use since the third century. See the analysis of *Didascalia Apostolorum* in Peter Gemeinhardt, "Men of Letters or Fishermen? The Education of Bishops and Clerics in Late Antiquity," in *Teachers in Late Antique Christianity*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt et al., SERAPHIM 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2018), 32–55, esp. 37–39.

250 Blowers, *Drama*, 319–320.

251 *Gentiles* 34.29–31.

252 *Letter* 5–6. For analyses of these passages, see Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 58–60; Krawiec, "Literacy and Memory," 366–367; Robin Darling Young, "The Role of Letters in the

that, emulating Antony's contemplative approach, the Evagrian gnostic does not ignore the theological information written within the creation; instead, he or she deploys the elements of the method, earlier discussed, in order to understand the cosmos in the light of its creator.

Considering the above, Evagrius outlines a contemplative method which has at its centre the gnostics. Being ascetically purified, advanced in virtue, disciplinarily trained, scripturally informed, and divinely guided, the gnostics peer into the universe to discover its principles. Once discovered, the principles facilitate both their understanding of the cosmos and a good grasp of God's activities within the creation. That the Evagrian gnostics soar above the creation in search for the creator, beyond the purview of the first natural contemplation, is unquestionable. However, the divine quest does not exclude a genuine interest in the world—after the fashion of Antony, who is paradigmatic for Evagrius' approach to reality.

In what follows I briefly refer to the cosmology of *Chapters*, but only in order to return to the issue of Evagrius' misrepresentation by his contemporaries and modern scholars alike. It is on this note that I conclude the present section.

2.4 *The Evagrian Worldview*

We saw above that *Gnostic* and other works contain elements of a contemplative method, together with denoting the Platonic contours of the Evagrian universe. But one does not find there anything conclusive in the way of a complete worldview. No wonder scholars focus upon *Chapters* and its rich content. And, taken at face value, the writing does not disappoint, regardless of how difficult its intricate layout makes the researcher's task.²⁵³ My intention, here, is not to present the work or to discuss the cosmological insights therein. Instead, once I summarise the scholarly representation of the relevant material, I will challenge its accuracy, and propose a different interpretation. I begin by summarising the established view.²⁵⁴

Contemporary scholars, guided by metaphysical assumptions, endeavour to systematise the dispersed elements of *Chapters* into a cosmology.²⁵⁵ Their

Works of Evagrius," in *Evagrius and His Legacy*, 154–174, esp. 158–162. For Evagrius' broader idea of perceiving the divine wisdom in the creation, see Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 295–298.

253 Guillaumont, *Les Képhalaia gnostica*, 35–37. Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, xxi–xxii.

254 This section uses material from my article, "A Note on Evagrius," with the editors' permission.

255 Banev, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 24–26. Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 323–340. Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 343–348. Guillaumont, *Les Képhalaia gnostica*, 37–39. Harmless,

approach does not differ significantly from Evagrius' first critics. In short, his worldview refers to two creations, one spiritual and static, resulting in undifferentiated and immaterial beings, and one material and dynamic, characterised by hierarchical structures and diversity. The beings of the first creation had a theocentric orientation, contemplating God and experiencing plenitude. After a time, most of the first creations adopted a centrifugal movement, distancing themselves from the divine source and falling from their original condition. It is because of their separation from God that the second creation occurred, that is, of the material universe, where the fallen beings relearn the truth of their existence through contemplation and take the journey back to God. But their intellectual and sensorial disorientation makes contemplation and return impossible. They need salvation. Ontologically, or in terms of their first creation, all beings are one. This stance echoes the shared patristic conviction discussed in Chapter Three, earlier within this chapter, and in the next two, that the common denominator of all things is the fact of being created.²⁵⁶ In their current state, however, pertaining to the second creation, the beings differ in proportion to their alienation. Diversity is divinely sanctioned—through the activity of judgment—ascribing to each being its due rank. Judgment, working in tandem with providence in order to facilitate salvation, does not mean punishment. As for Origen (and Basil, as we shall see in Chapter Five), providence gives the diversified beings opportunities to retrieve purity, to learn the ways of contemplation, and to return to a theocentric existence. Intrinsic to the providential work is divine pedagogy, which reveals to the fallen how to retrieve their lost condition. In turn, the climax of divine pedagogy, as well as the culmination of the providential economy, is Christ's incarnation, a being who did not fall. Distinct from and yet one with the Logos—the source of existence and meaning—Christ frees the fallen creations from the material bondage. He shows them the way back through grace, asceticism, contemplation, and prayer. The return, however, takes ages, the creations experiencing successive transformations into higher, angelic beings, and finally deification. Eschatologically, when the journey of all the fallen ends, all will be restored to their original status, once again becoming one, Christlike, or *isochristoi*, his equals.

This metaphysical outline of Evagrius' doctrine can be encountered, with slight variations, in most scholarly works. An exception is Ramelli's line-by-line commentary on *Chapters*, which discusses the elements within their proper

Desert Christians, 354–358. Linge, "Leading the Life of Angels," 543–548. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxxiv–v, xxxvii–xl. Stewart, "The Encounter," 9–10; "Imageless Prayer," 176.

256 The same understanding features in Antony's letters. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 64–68.

literary context, avoiding reductionist representations.²⁵⁷ Otherwise, scholars commonly infer that the enigmatic and disjointed aphorisms of Evagrius—"a thinker standing in an essentialist (Platonic) tradition," as David Linge states²⁵⁸—converge into a metaphysically articulated, consistent system of the world. They believe, then, that he proposes a complete cosmological narrative, whose scattered elements fall nicely together in one, simple, and coherent model, as just sketched above. In so doing they take their cue from the Origen scholars who, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, interpret the thinking of the earlier Alexandrian in the same systematic and metaphysical key.²⁵⁹

The above scholarly reconstruction means to offer insights into the early Christian worldview. As such, it fits in well with the present study. But behind this painstaking reconstruction lies the modern penchant for reducing complexity to manageable proportions. And in so doing it falls short of Evagrius' own intentions, who deliberately left both his *Chapters* and his cosmology incomplete and open.²⁶⁰ That said, the tesserae which scholars have glued together into a perfect mosaic can be rearranged differently; in the absence of a complete outline, since not even *Letter* offers one, that can easily be done, should someone wish to try. The reductive factor behind this received model is, of course, the metaphysical assumption. Since Evagrius must have nurtured a metaphysical vision of reality, all the tesserae come together in a coherent cosmology. Recently, however, serious doubts have been raised about the metaphysical assumption, not counting the discussions around Evagrius' trinitarian and christological orthodoxy.²⁶¹ Might not the resulting reconstruction fall apart along with its assumption?

The most recent challenge to the established view came from Ramelli,²⁶² who appears to have echoed Crouzel's argument in favour of reading the whole of Origen's corpus, not isolated writings or passages.²⁶³ Accordingly, she states the need to keep together Evagrius' metaphysical and ascetic writings, thus far analysed separately. While the current representation draws upon his specula-

257 Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, 3–374.

258 Linge, "Leading the Life of Angels," 547.

259 This parallel was already noticed. Casiday, *Evagrius*, 25–26, 31, 34. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxxvii–xxxviii.

260 Casiday, *Evagrius*, 27.

261 Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 17, 167–242; *Evagrius*, 30. Daley, "Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy," 17–38 (this author also points out slight divergences from "Cappadocian orthodoxy" in Evagrius' mystical teaching; 38–41). Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, xxv–vii. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xxxvi–vii.

262 Ramelli, "Evagrius Ponticus," 160, 187, 198, 223; *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, lxxxvi.

263 Crouzel, *Origène*, 220–221.

tive writings, his true purposes become apparent only in the light of the corpus in its entirety. The corpus reveals the coherence of a spiritual message in the “Origenian” and thus orthodox—not “Origenist” and heretical—tradition. But the internal coherence of the corpus does not translate into an external systematisation of its disparate elements. Complexity is the dominant of Evagrius’ thinking, with *Chapters* and its multilayered and unsystematic structure as the best illustration. Having established this, Ramelli demanded that an appropriate approach be adopted, able to account for nonlinear, complex thinking. Surprisingly, however, the metaphysical assumption continued to guide her analysis. As a result, her study of *Chapters* draws the contours of a thick theological, cosmological, and anthropological system. Her study also proves that what until recently was deemed heretical in Evagrius’ speculative thinking is actually orthodox. But, I believe, Ramelli did not reap all the fruits of her proposal to bridge the metaphysical and the ascetic sides of the corpus. This, precisely, is my concern in what follows.

Closer to a solution is Casiday’s rejection of the view that Evagrius was a speculative thinker committed to doctrinal systematisation.²⁶⁴ Central to his mindset was monastic pedagogy, while his intention was to articulate a lifestyle that leads to insight. In this light, the writing of interest here, *Chapters*, does not propose “an airtight philosophical worldview” or a “metaphysical jigsaw,” rather observing heuristic criteria.²⁶⁵ It is the heuristic approach of monastic pedagogy that shaped the teaching into enigmatic statements meant to stimulate inquisitiveness and reflection. The same pedagogy demands personal transformation as indispensable for grasping the message. Eagerness and mere analytical skills cannot suffice; the reader must attain spiritual maturity in order to grasp these metaphors and conundrums. Casiday pointed out that contemporary scholars cannot ignore this prerequisite in their research either.²⁶⁶ Accordingly, he organised the selected texts after internal criteria, proposing a different way of reading the corpus. His suggestion amounts to reconstructing the Evagrian thinking from the vantage point of monastic pedagogy, not from metaphysical assumptions. Casiday developed this approach elsewhere.²⁶⁷

Casiday and Ramelli demonstrated that the current metaphysical interpretation of Evagrius is flawed. Evagrius is neither a speculative theologian in any sort of scholastic tradition nor a modern systematic thinker. He is a pedagogue

264 Casiday, *Evagrius*, 25–28.

265 Casiday, *Evagrius*, 26. For a broader analysis of Evagrius’ approach, see Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 322–325.

266 Casiday, *Evagrius*, 37.

267 See Casiday, *Reconstructing*, especially the second half of the book.

whose closest analogues are Hadot's philosopher,²⁶⁸ Clement, Origen, and Egypt's desert sages. Hadot himself acknowledged him as a monastic philosopher.²⁶⁹ Torjesen, in turn, affirmed that he was an "inspired interpreter," heir to the early Christian tradition of prophetic teaching.²⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Casiday and Ramelli did not discuss the possible *monastic* significance of Evagrius' cosmological, ontological, and anthropological stances. To this issue, that is, the sense of his metaphysical musings, I must now turn. In tackling this matter, I take my cue from Niculescu's deconstruction of Origen *metaphysicus* in favour of the hermeneutical appraisal of his thinking—which I discussed in Chapter Three—together with Golitzin's reinterpretation of Ps-Dionysius as a monastic theologian.²⁷¹ Both posited convincing arguments against the current metaphysical bias. Their arguments, I propose, are applicable here too. Given that what underpins the speculative thinking of the two masters is spiritual pedagogy, one wonders if that could not be also true in Evagrius' case?

The best way of introducing my proposal is by giving a concrete example. *Chapters* 3.28 describes the soul as a mind that carelessly, through lack of vigilance, fell from the primordial unity into the order of the practical life. Scholars take this passage, metaphysically, as concerning the transit of the spirit into the psychic condition of the second creation.²⁷² Be that as it may, Evagrius did not talk to metaphysicians; he articulated monastic life for a monastic audience, above all for his advanced students whom he trained to solve such puzzles.²⁷³ It is very possible that, to that end, he adopted and adapted Origen and Clement's heuristic pedagogy. Against this backdrop, most if not all of his metaphysical stances should be understood—at least on a certain hermeneutical level—as metaphorical depictions of monastic life. In monastic code, the passage in question speaks of the tests, turmoil, and dangers which the advanced face during their journey, including the possibility of regressing to the status of *praktikoi*. The closing reference to practical life or basic asceticism leaves no doubt that this is what the passage means. Here, the primordial unity of the minds means the fellowship of the saints, perhaps Evagrius' own circle.²⁷⁴ He surely borrowed this trope from Athanasius, who, we saw above, took Antony and

268 See Casiday, *Evagrius*, 27.

269 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 129, 133, 135, 136–138.

270 See Torjesen, "The Alexandrian Tradition," 299.

271 Golitzin, *Mystagogy* and *Et Introibo*.

272 So Lingé, "Leading the Life of Angels," 545 and Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia gnostika*, 156–157.

273 Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 76–77. Golitzin, *Et Introibo*, 328–329.

274 Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 76–99.

his disciples as a paradigm for the saintly company from which Adam fell.²⁷⁵ In turn, Athanasius must have emulated—as Evagrius himself did—Origen's scriptural and liturgical theme of God in the company of the gods.²⁷⁶ In short, Athanasius and Evagrius adapted to their monastic entourage Origen's liturgical and scriptural approach to the fellowship of the saints.

Furthermore, the mind's degradation into the soul of a *praktikos* signifies the ascetic who, relapsing into bodily passions, must go back to the basics in order to retrieve perfection. This, again, is a familiar monastic trope²⁷⁷ which must be drawing on Origen's take on the gradual fall of the saints.²⁷⁸ I discussed the implications of Origen's approach in Chapter Three, and I believe that those points are applicable here too. In the same key, of ascetic theology in the guise of metaphysics, Evagrius' challenging statements about shedding the body²⁷⁹ and the final restoration²⁸⁰ are to be seen as metaphorical references to defeating bodily passions and returning to an advanced experience.²⁸¹ Accordingly, the reverse movement—the mind's ascent from the bodily and the psychic conditions—signifies the existential changes that occur during the spiritual journey. Bucur's Clement must have been Evagrius' guide here.²⁸² Against this backdrop, the spiritual ascent is not an ontological event; it does not consist in becoming literally angelic, disembodied, or indeed immaterial. What we have here is a parable of the monastic trajectory—a life traditionally dubbed “angelic”²⁸³—whose mature attainment, as Harmless pointed out, is “immaterial” or undisturbed prayer.²⁸⁴ The same applies to Evagrius' metaphysical discourse *in toto*.

Conveying monastic life through cosmological parables is quite consistent with Evagrius' manner of scriptural interpretation. Scholars have noted his tremendous exegetical skill.²⁸⁵ We discovered earlier his identification of two scriptural meanings, literal and allegorical, which he relates to the threefold

275 Cf. Costache, “Adam's Holiness,” 327–329, 332–333, 335–337.

276 See Behr, “Introduction,” xlv–vi; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 141–142.

277 Costache, “Adam's Holiness,” 357, 361, 363–364.

278 *Principles* 1.3.8.143–148.

279 *Chapters* 1.26; 3.68.

280 *Chapters* 3.60.

281 *Chapters* 5.22. See Blowers, *Drama*, 329–330 and Williams, *The Divine Sense*, 192–195, 213–214.

282 See Bucur, “Hierarchy, Eldership, Isangelia,” 19–24, 27–42 (for explicit Evagian parallels, see *ibid.* 3, 13–14, 18, 21–22); “The Other Clement of Alexandria,” 254–265.

283 See Jonathan Zechar, “The Angelic Life in Desert and Ladder: John Climacus's Re-Formulation of Ascetic Spirituality,” *J ECS* 21:1 (2013): 111–136, esp. 116–124.

284 Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 351–352.

285 Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 100–132. Dysinger, “An Exegetical Way of Seeing,” 37–38.

curriculum of praxis, physics, and theology.²⁸⁶ Running parallel to the literal sense, allegorically the narratives might signify one, two, or three stages of the curriculum. The finding of Blowers that Evagrius deploys the same method for scriptural and for natural contemplation shows that this presupposition is central to his thinking. And if the metaphysical discourse obeys the same rule—and I see no reason why it should not do so—then a monastic “spirit” underpins the metaphysical “letter” of his cosmological speculations. Surmising his position from a double foundation, scriptural and monastic, under the guise of cosmological narratives and metaphysical speculations Evagrius speaks of the experience of the advanced. My conclusion reverses Ramelli’s, who reads the closing sentence of *Chapters* as indicating the “intention of producing a foundational work on the principles of reality,”²⁸⁷ therefore a metaphysical discourse disguised as monastic lore. Her reading is consistent with her desire to prove the orthodoxy of Evagrius’ metaphysics, but ignores the heuristic nature of both Clementine and monastic pedagogy from which Evagrius took his cue. In this light, just as Niculescu and Golitzin reinterpreted Origen and Ps-Dionysius, so Evagrius emerges as a monastic pedagogue who arrayed his ascetic message in the lofty attire of metaphysical speculations. It follows that, in all likelihood, *Chapters* was meant as a reader accompanying his lessons in heuristic methodology.

One might wonder why Evagrius adopted this metaphorical manner of presenting spiritual progress. The answer, I suggest, rests with the traditional grounds of his approach. Even as he was an ascetic in Origen’s tradition, he was also Clement’s admirer. From both, as well as from the spiritual masters he mentioned in *Monk* and *Gnostic*, he learnt the elements of heuristic pedagogy. I discuss further aspects of this pedagogy in Chapters Five and Six. Suffice it to point out here that it is not about providing straightforward answers—reserved for beginners and the uneducated²⁸⁸—but about challenging the advanced disciples to work out solutions for themselves. Thus, when they read enigmatic statements, Evagrius’ students were to infer the wisdom which guided their progress. We met with a similar approach in Origen’s *Homily*, which takes the cosmology of Genesis as a roadmap for the spiritual journey. But, whereas Origen explicitly interpreted to that effect, Evagrius, following Clement’s con-

286 *Gnostic* 18. See also *Gnostic* 19–20.

287 Ramelli, *Evagrius’s Kephalaia gnostika*, 373–374. The same goes for Stewart’s (“Imageless Prayer,” 180–182) wonder at why Evagrius placed “his ascetic and spiritual theology within such a problematic framework.”

288 *Chapters* 4.61.

cealment strategy,²⁸⁹ challenged the readers themselves to crack the code. The closest that he came to Origen's approach in *Homily* is in *Letter* 51–67, where he considers the classical narrative of creation, fall, and salvation as a canvas upon which to paint matters of the ascetic experience. Hints of the same cosmological rendering of monastic life are not missing, however, in *Chapters*, where the stars stand for the gnostic teachers called to illumine those still in the darkness of ignorance.²⁹⁰

This method was not new, of course, being rehearsed long before the early Christian centuries in the Platonic tradition of teaching through narrative discourse, images, and analogies.²⁹¹ Nearer to home, Athanasian Antony, whose example guided Evagrius in more than one respect, espoused ascetic philosophy through the means of apocalyptic imagery.²⁹² This is what Evagrius' speculations really are: images iterating the monastic message. As such, but from a different angle, they are his way of reworking Origen's cosmological stances,²⁹³ which he took as a cultural reference for conveying monastic wisdom. Origen's *Principles*, as I have shown in Chapter Three, paved the way for his approach.

That said, as with Origen, genuine cosmological statements are not missing in Evagrius' writings. Where they do occur—as for example in *Chapters* 5.89, which asserts that there was nothing before the creation's first eon and that nothing will follow after its last eon—one does not necessarily expect to find hidden messages. Hidden, spiritual messages, we saw above, accompany only his enigmatic statements. But, overall, his cosmological narrative remains inseparable from the spiritual message of monastic life, and must be interpreted through the lens of this message.

In the light of the above, the hypothesis that Evagrius believed in creation's dematerialisation and that he proposed a spiritualist metaphysics does not stand scrutiny. My argument is primarily based on *Gnostic*, the middle part of a triptych on asceticism and contemplation, where his genuine interest in the natural world can be discerned. His gnostics, variously trained, adopt a scientific way of examining the cosmos and, purified and dispassionate, strive to

289 See Kovacs, "Concealment and Gnostic Exegesis," 414–437.

290 *Chapters* 3.84.

291 Luc Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 16–17, 25–28. Also, both Plato and Philo, the sources of Evagrius' master, Clement, established parallels between external and internal realities. See Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 58–63 and Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 276–278, 412–416.

292 See Jonathan Zeher, "Antony's Vision of Death? Athanasius of Alexandria, Palladius of Helenopolis, and Egyptian Mortuary Religion," *JLA* 7:1 (2014): 159–176, esp. 168–170.

293 See e.g. the chain of preexistence–fall–ascension in *Principles* 3.5.4.

grasp the invisible principles of things through contemplation. Beyond that, the gnostics generously give alms, which represents the proper use of material things. Furthermore, they adopt different teaching protocols for various audiences, using heuristic strategies for advanced students. Accordingly, the discourse addressed to the advanced is nonlinear, metaphorical, and provocative. Working as prolegomena for *Chapters*, these prerequisites—which receive traditional endorsement in *Gnostic's* last sections—do not support the current view that Evagrius preached cosmic and anthropological dematerialisation.²⁹⁴ As with Origen's approach, his supposedly metaphysical speculations in *Chapters* were written for advanced students, whom he trained to read between the lines and to decode conundrums. These students knew that the many cultural references therein—classical and Christian—represent luring metaphors and tantalising puzzles. Behind the veils of his cosmological narrative they discerned an intricate map of the spiritual journey, with its ups and downs, not the perspective of a dissolving world. Against this backdrop, I concur with Casiday that a researcher who has not undergone the Evagrian curriculum must not pass definitive judgments in regards to his teaching.

My understanding of Evagrius' approach offers an alternative to the current view. That view does not account for his statements regarding the dematerialisation of the universe, the worth of the natural world, and the proper use of material goods. The solution to this difficulty, I propose, cannot be found in the one-sided analysis of either his ascetic writings or his metaphysical ones. The solution comes from interpreting the metaphysical works through the lens of the monastic ones. More precisely, and as *Chapters* 3.28 illustrates, it is a matter of taking his metaphysical discourse as a parable of progress and regress in the monastic life. I take my cue from Evagrius' own hints at how to decode his writings, his traditional forebears, and the manner in which later monastic writers redeployed his wisdom within their own settings. It is true that this solution gives little insight into Evagrius' cosmology, but it shows that one should not look for answers where they are not meant to be found.

3 Conclusions

The above analysis brought to the fore a number of elements of continuity spanning from the early Alexandrians, whose thought I discussed in Chapter Three, to the end of the fourth century. Under the influence of Clement's

294 My view corresponds to Bunge's ("Une citation scripturaire," 25–29).

trailblazing work in the hermeneutics of creation, Origen proposed a contemplative way of looking at things by which he secured the survival of the method, and in fact developed it. At the core of this hermeneutic lies the figure of the contemplative person, indeed a saint or a “holy gnostic,” able to read the meaningful cosmos as “another scripture.” The figure of the contemplative person remained central to the authors discussed here, Athanasius and Evagrius, who, moreover, identified the gnostic with known desert ascetics. Specifically, what they conveyed is the image of Antony the contemplative, not a fully fledged method of natural contemplation. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that instead of cosmology both authors proposed views of a world full of divine signs and messages—its syntax as it were—meant to become a transparent icon of its creator. In one case, Evagrius’, who iterated Origen’s approach, the cosmological discourse primarily became a parable of the ascetic life. Apart from this peculiarity, for him, as for his predecessors, to live within a meaningful world was an enriching experience. Contemplation of the creation obtained the meaning of life in view of the creator’s salvific intention. This proved, in turn, that for the early Christians the encounter with God occurred within the confines of the creation, not above and beyond the world. It is in this light that they addressed, albeit minimally, information and methods from the available disciplines, which they integrated into their respective theological discourses.

With the contributions of the author to whom I turn next, Basil of Caesarea, the early Christian representation of reality progressed towards becoming—by the standards of that age—a genuine cosmology. That said, we shall soon realise that his input did not depart by much from the contemplative approach of his Alexandrian predecessors.

From the Periphery to the Centre

In the first two chapters we saw how early Christian thinking zigzagged from a lack of interest in a world haunted by the spectre of social marginalisation, to an appreciation for the world considered through the lens of the church and its liturgical vision. However, in Chapter One we discovered that, even when the early Christians showed less attention to the cosmos, they still construed it as God's creation even as they pictured themselves as crucified for the wellbeing of the world. Against this incipiently positive backdrop, they began to tentatively reinterpret the world by reading into it the traits of a familiar milieu, namely, their experience in the liturgy. During this reinterpretation they realised that—far from being exiled from heaven—they were to live within a cosmic ecclesia. Like them and together with them, the cosmos confessed and praised one God, creator and saviour of the universe. It did not take them long to progress from this realisation to articulating a complex worldview at the nexus of faith, Scripture, and culture. The materials discussed in Chapter Two perfectly illustrate this stage of the process.

Taking their cue from these contributions, other authors—whose thinking I examined in the next two chapters—adopted a contemplative approach which presupposed training, method, and personal transformation. For them, the world was a school of divine wisdom whose lessons require the use of hermeneutical and heuristic devices. As this kind of sophisticated engagement with the cosmos had a limited audience, its impact was negligible outside the ascetic milieu. The task of bringing cosmology from the periphery into the centre of Christian reflection, indeed to its mature form, fell to the Cappadocian theologians.¹ Of their relevant contributions, this and the next chapter focus on the input of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa.

Basil “the Great,” metropolitan bishop of Caesarea in the province of Cappadocia, Asia Minor, was a major theologian of the fourth century.² His author-

1 Eftthymios Nicolaidis, *Science and Eastern Orthodoxy: From the Greek Fathers to the Age of Globalization*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 1–23. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*. This chapter reutilises material from my studies, “Christian Worldview” and “Apologetic, moral și mistic,” which it presents in a completely new and expanded form.

2 For an overview of the debates around the date of Basil's death, see Anna M. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, VCSup 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 32–39.

ity went uncontested through the centuries and across the Christian spectrum. In the last twenty years or so, however, the Basilian bibliography has thinned.³ Recent scholars have examined his trinitarian theology, epistemology, pastoral practice, ascetic life, ethics, homiletics, and exegesis, but showed almost no interest in his contribution to the Christian worldview and the apologetic discourse. This must have to do with the issues discussed in the introduction to this book, especially the apprehension showed by humanities scholars when it comes to the hard sciences. Not so with the previous generation of scholars. John F. Callahan, Stanislas Giet, Jaroslav Pelikan, Aimé Puech, and D.S. Wallace-Hadrill studied the primary source on which this chapter focuses, *Hexaemeron*, from various disciplinary perspectives, revealing Basil's interest in astronomy, biology, cosmology, and physics. They showed that his approach to these disciplines was part of a sustained strategy to bridge the classical worldview and the Christian representation of reality.⁴ Similarly, several contributors to the double volume edited by Paul Fedwick in the early 1980s established the important place reserved for philosophy in his thinking.⁵ More recently and to some extent, Stephen Hildebrand iterated the same approach.⁶ Apart from these, while most scholars discussed matters of tangential relevance to my pur-

3 Here are the available monographs. Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names: Christian Theology and Late-Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy*, VCSup 103 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010). Nicu Dumitraşcu, *Basil the Great: Faith, Mission and Diplomacy in the Shaping of Christian Doctrine* (Milton Park and New York: Routledge, 2018). Stephen M. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007). Timothy P. McConnell, *Illumination in Basil of Caesarea's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014). Jean-François Racine, *The Text of Matthew in the Writings of Basil of Caesarea* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004). Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea: A Guide to His Life and Doctrine*, CC16 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012). Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, OECs (Oxford University Press, 2009). Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Anna M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great*, OECs (Oxford University Press, 2005).

4 John F. Callahan, "Greek Philosophy and the Cappadocian Cosmology," *DOP* 12 (1958): 30–57. Stanislas Giet, 'Introduction,' in *Homélies sur l'hexaéméron*, 5–84. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*. Aimé Puech, *Histoire de la littérature grecque chrétienne: Depuis les origines jusqu'à la fin du IV^e siècle*, vol. 2: *Le II^e et le III^e siècles* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928), 252–261. Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*.

5 *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, two vols, ed. Paul Jonathan Fedwick (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981). See for instance Milton V. Anastos, "Basil's Κατὰ Εὐνομίον, a Critical Analysis," 1:67–136; George L. Kustas, "Saint Basil and the Rhetorical Tradition," 1:221–279; John M. Rist, "Basil's 'Neoplatonism': Its Background and Nature," 1:137–220.

6 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*.

poses,⁷ only a few really approached the area under consideration here. Colin Gunton's analysis of *Hexaemeron* focused on the rapport between the creator and the creation.⁸ In turn, Peter Bouteneff researched the same work for the use of Genesis 1–3 therein.⁹ From the 1990s onwards, his cosmological thinking came under scholarly scrutiny in connection with other topics and areas, such as ethics¹⁰ and theological knowledge.¹¹ Köckert's solid analysis of Basilian cosmology,¹² followed, very recently, by Louth's brief study,¹³ are the great exceptions to the trend of the last couple of decades. Much is yet to be discussed.

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- 7 Lewis Ayres and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Basil of Caesarea," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1:459–470. Emmanuel Clapsis, "St Basil's Cosmology," *Diakonia* 17:3 (1982): 215–223. Emmanuel Danezis et al., "The Hexaemeron of St Basil the Great and the Cosmological Views of His Time," in *Science and Orthodoxy, a Necessary Dialogue*, ed. Basarab Nicolescu and Magda Stavinschi (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), 103–109. Richard Lim, "The Politics of Interpretation in Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron*," *VC* 44:4 (1990): 351–370. David C. Lindberg, "Early Christian Attitudes toward Nature," in *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 47–56. Adrian Marinescu, "Învățătura despre lumină (φῶς/φᾶς) și funcția ei liturgică în lume la Sf. Vasile cel Mare: De la Sfânta Scriptură la Sf. Grigorie Palama și Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae," in *Părinții Capadocieni*, ed. Petre Semen and Liviu Petcu (Iași: Editura Fundației Academice Axis, 2009), 223–295. John Anthony McGuckin, "Patterns of Biblical Exegesis in the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 37–54. Carl Séan O'Brien, "Creation, Cosmogony, and Cappadocian Cosmology," in *The Ecumenical Legacy of the Cappadocians*, ed. Nicu Dumitrașcu, PEID (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 7–20. Philip Rousseau, "Human Nature and Its Material Setting in Basil of Caesarea's Sermons on the Creation," *HJ* 49 (2008): 222–239. Tamara Saeteros Pérez, "El *De Genesi ad litteram* de san Agustín en el marco de la literatura hexameral desarrollada por san Basilio, san Ambrosio y san Buenaventura," *SM* 81 (2015): 43–71. Darren Sarisky, "Who Can Listen to *Sermons on Genesis*? Theological Exegesis and Theological Anthropology in Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron* Homilies," *SP* 67:15 (2013): 13–23. Constantin Voicu, "Învățătura despre crearea lumii la Sf. Vasile cel Mare," in *Sfântul Vasile cel Mare: Închinare la 1630 de ani*, second edn, ed. Emilian Popescu and Adrian Marinescu, Studia Basiliana (București: Basilica, 2009), 179–199.
- 8 Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 16–17, 68–73, 108.
- 9 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 133–136.
- 10 Rousseau, *Basil*, 320–337.
- 11 DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea*, 137–138, 158. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 56.
- 12 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 312–398 (including the analysis of *Hexaemeron* at 324–391).
- 13 Louth, "Basil and the Fathers," 72–79.

In what follows I look at Basil's representations of reality as such and compare them with several patristic antecedents (Athanasius, Clement, Origen, and Theophilus). Specifically, I examine his formulations of cosmology at the nexus of faith and science, of the principle of synergy or the interactive dimension of reality, and of the universe's theological significance. In elaborating on these topics, Basil deepened the Christian appreciation for the world understood as a place where knowledge is acquired through research, reflection, and higher vision. In so doing, he developed the method of natural contemplation discussed in the previous two chapters. Above all, he established the topic of the cosmos as "another scripture" and "theological school" on broader grounds, democratising natural contemplation. The common notion of Basil's cosmology as primarily "scientific" must be revised. What he proposes in *Hexaemeron* is an approach to the creation that requires both analysis and contemplation.

1 Basil, Theology, and Science

In the homilies known as *Hexaemeron*, the date of whose original delivery, editing, and publication is still disputed,¹⁴ Basil analyses the Genesis narrative of the first six days of creation line-by-line. The resulting discourse consists in an interdisciplinary worldview replete with ethical implications, against the backdrop of an exegetical engagement of the text. This depiction of the universe remained normative throughout the medieval period,¹⁵ despite the limitations of his method and the imperfections of the work.¹⁶ However, the idea that Basil attempted a complete cosmology—from beginning to the eschaton¹⁷—must be taken judiciously. Such a comprehensive endeavour would have been unsuitable for the soteriological, pastoral, and missional scope of the homilies.

14 We know the steps leading to publication. These homilies on creation were first delivered as sermons in church, being published after Basil polished the notes of his stenographers. Paul J. Fedwick, "A Chronology of the Life and Works of Basil of Caesarea," in *Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, 13–21. Giet, "Introduction," 6–7. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:216. Rousseau, *Basil*, 363.

15 Giet, "Introduction," 70–71. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 133. Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 7. Voicu, "Crearea lumii," 180–181. Saeteros Pérez, "El De Genesi," 45–53.

16 For example, in *Hexaemeron* 8.2.22–30 he had to return to a topic he overlooked. See Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 18 and Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 6–7. Imperfections of this kind do not annul the consistency and harmony of the work. See Saeteros Pérez, "El De Genesi," 50.

17 Several scholars assert just that. Clapsis, "Cosmology," 216. McGuckin, "Patterns," 46. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 91. Rousseau, *Basil*, 319–320.

He alluded to this scope on various occasions,¹⁸ but was not so clear as to the manner of proceeding. Three main factors appear to have conditioned his strategy, which he tackled by way of a combined approach, theological, scriptural, and scientific.

First of all, Manichaeism was widespread in the region, disquieting a Christian community still apprehensive of its context. Manichaeism conceived of a cosmos that was ontologically flawed and theologically meaningless. This pessimistic worldview was incompatible with the perception of God's creation as good and as a welcoming home for humankind. Accordingly, Basil mentions it alongside several "evil and atheistic" understandings of the original darkness from which the universe emerged (see Gen 1:2).¹⁹ The reference to Manichaeism in the company of other ancient dualisms indicates that these were his polemical targets—*pace* Bouteneff and Rousseau—not the Arian heresy.²⁰ It is true that at the end of *Hexaemeron* he argued against Arianism and Judaism, but did so because of their failure to interpret Gen 1:26 as a trinitarian allusion,²¹ not in connection with the cosmological focus of the homilies. More importantly, Manichaeism stimulated the development of the Christian worldview: its rebuttal required a positive depiction of the universe based on ethical, philosophical, scientific, scriptural, and theological perspectives. Accordingly, Basil's efforts led, as Young pointed out, to the formulation of a "philosophical theodicy, asserting the goodness of God in creation and providence."²² Relevant to my purposes is his unequivocal depiction of the cosmos as good, ordered, and meaningful.

A second factor influencing Basil to articulate and nuance the Christian worldview was the succumbing of many Christians to an interest in astrol-

18 See *Hexaemeron* 1.1.42–46; 2.1.13–17; 3.10.18–31. A number of scholars mention the pastoral protocols in place. Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 133. Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 32. Clapsis, "Cosmology," 215–216. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 318. O'Brien, "Creation," 8–9. Recently, Dumitraşcu, *Basil the Great*, 142, discerned a political intention behind Basil's pastoral interests.

19 *Hexaemeron* 2.4.16–22. See Lim, "Politics," 359–360. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:217. Saeteros Pérez, "El De Genesi," 48.

20 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 131. Rousseau, *Basil*, 321.

21 *Hexaemeron* 9.6.26–98. Ayres, *Nicaea*, 314, 317. McConnell, *Illumination*, 72.

22 Frances M. Young, "Atonement and Theodicy: Some Explorations," *SP* 13:2 (1975): 330–333, esp. 331. Cappadocian theodicy is quite well researched. Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 34. Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 122–123. Morwenna Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality in Cappadocian Theology," *J ECS* 20:2 (2012): 179–211, esp. 189. Bronwen Neil, "Divine Providence and Free Will in Gregory of Nyssa and His Theological Milieu," in *Cappadocian Legacy*, 315–328, esp. 321–325.

ogy. Astrological beliefs and practices betray a want of scientific information, but, more importantly, endanger the Christian ethos by denying the possibility of free choice.²³ In refuting the premises of astrology, Basil made ample use of Scripture—which affirms human freedom—and the available scientific description of reality—which elucidates the mechanics of natural causality.²⁴ His position corresponds to the conviction of Ignatius and Athanasius that Christ freed the creation from evil,²⁵ without using these words.

A third factor, demanding a complex strategy on Basil's part, was the Hellenistic background of his Christian readership,²⁶ to which the cosmology of Genesis—of Near and Middle Eastern origin—was largely foreign. In order to render the scriptural message in terms familiar to the readers of his time, he borrowed from the available sciences, whose concepts and categories he substituted for the metaphors of the account of creation. The broader significance of this approach will soon become apparent. In this light, contrary to Rousseau's opinion that *Hexaemeron* "had little to do with circumstance,"²⁷ what motivated this approach were pastoral and missional strategies deployed in view of external and internal challenges.

It is at this juncture that Basil's recourse to scientific information becomes apparent. In order to confirm the goodness of the world, to demythologise the cosmos, and to render it intelligible, he described the creation from the vantage point of the available sciences. Scholars have noted his abundant references to anatomical, biological, cosmological, and physical data,²⁸ and his

23 *Hexaemeron* 6.5–7. See Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 52–53 and Hegedus, *Early Christianity*, 30–31, 35–36, 44, 113, 127, 159.

24 See the full exposé in *Hexaemeron* 6.5–7. A series of scholars dealt with his treatment of astrology. Blowers, *Drama*, 128. Duhem, *Le système du monde*, 2:405–406. Paul J. Fedwick, "The Translations of the Works of Basil before 1400," in *Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, 2:439–512, esp. 459, 468. Colin E. Gunton, *The Doctrine of Creation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 60. Hegedus, *Early Christianity*, 30–31, 35–36, 44, 127, 159, 356, 360. Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 5, 37. Rousseau, *Basil*, 333. Daniel F. Stramara, "Surveying the Heavens: Early Christian Writers on Astronomy," *SVTQ* 46:2–3 (2002): 147–162, esp. 152.

25 Ignatius, *Ephesians* 19.3. Athanasius, *Incarnation* 15, 29, 31, 40.

26 At the time, his Cappadocian audience was not thoroughly Hellenised, but his readers were. For the limited Hellenisation of Cappadocia, see O'Brien, "Creation," 7.

27 Rousseau, *Basil*, 319.

28 Archbishop Chrysostomos and Hieromonk Patapios, "Science and Knowledge in the Patristic and Monastic Traditions of the Eastern Orthodox Church," *TSR* 2 (2007): 183–194, esp. 190. Danezis et al., "The Hexaemeron," 104–105. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 114–117, 121–122. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 322–324. Louth, "The Fathers on Genesis," 570; "Basil and the Fathers," 75–78; "The Cappadocians," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 289–301, esp. 294. Marinescu, "Despre lumină," 238–242. Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 7–21. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 53. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:217.

own personal observations of natural phenomena.²⁹ This was his subtle way of saying that Christians have no reason to fear either the universe or the theories of the *physiologoi*—philosophers of nature or scientists. By elucidating phenomena, the available sciences tame frightening views of nature, revealing creation's marvellous and useful sides. In turn, scriptural wisdom and the doctrine of creation tame scientific culture, deploying it as a channel for disseminating the Christian worldview.³⁰ This strategy does not uniquely appear in *Hexaemeron*. Basil applies here the very principles he sets out in his *Address*, where he shows Christian students how to negotiate the classical culture for their own purposes.³¹ His reliance on the available sciences indicates respect for research. There is no allowance, here, for lack of critical thinking. But critical thinking does not mean to agree with the sciences on grounds of authority either. In fact, Basil considered scientific information through a complex theological, scriptural, liturgical, and spiritual lens.³² No wonder *Hexaemeron* depicts a meaningful universe, described in scientific fashion yet bearing the marks of transcendent, divine wisdom.

Basil's undertaking was prodigious and challenging. To formulate a mature Christian view of reality, he had both to reevaluate the available scientific approaches theologically, and to retell the scriptural narrative in scientific language. Both tasks were necessary for the benefit of his readers. However, achieving this goal was not his only accomplishment. He also contributed to a process initiated through the apostolic dissemination of the message beyond Palestine—to Hellenistic milieus—a process the early Christian apologists furthered and which continued, long after his time, to the end of the Byzantine

Radde-Gallwitz, *Divine Simplicity*, 162–166. Stramara, “Surveying the Heavens,” 147, 152. Voicu, “Crearea lumii,” 186. For a different opinion, Duhem, *Le système du monde*, 2:395–396. Similarly, Giet, “Introduction,” 43, 64–69, asserted that Basil's awareness of the natural sciences was mediocre, largely drawing from handbooks.

29 Puech, *Histoire de la littérature*, 260. Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 2–3, 130.

30 For the transformation of ancient science by the Cappadocians, see Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*.

31 David Bradshaw, “Plato in the Cappadocian Fathers,” in *Plato in the Third Sophistic*, ed. Ryan C. Fowler, MS 50 (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 193–210, esp. 193–194. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 2–5. John A.L. Lee, “Why Didn't St Basil Write in New Testament Greek?” in *Cappadocian Legacy*, 63–77, esp. 63–64, 75–76. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 9–10, 29, 176, 182.

32 Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 196, 199, 314. Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz, “Basil of Caesarea,” 461–463. Blowers, *Drama*, 127. Giet, “Introduction,” 33. Kustas, “Saint Basil,” 250–252. Lindberg, “Early Christian Attitudes,” 51. Louth, “The Cappadocians,” 294. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 12–13.

era.³³ Basil's apologetic input therefore does not form an exception. He actually was determined to work within a tradition.³⁴ Alongside the Alexandrians, to whose influence I return in due course, he drew on Theophilus, the first Christian interpreter of the Genesis narrative of creation.³⁵

The challenges shaping the Basilian discourse in *Hexaemeron* mirror—without replicating them exactly—the issues Theophilus addresses in *To Autolytus*.³⁶ Theophilus is conversant with Stoic cosmology.³⁷ While engaging the latter, he presents Genesis as a credible cosmological source which matches the ancient theories and—given its divine inspiration—is even more credible than they were, free as it is of contradictions.³⁸ His references to ancient knowledge are both critical and creative.³⁹ Following Theophilus, Basil relies on the available descriptions of the universe, heavenly and earthly, astronomical and mineral, biological, and human. But his processing of scientific information is as complex as Theophilus'. Both avoid facile dismissals of science without relegating the theological lens to a footnote of their discourses.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Basil's approach cannot be confined to the influence of a single author. His use of Genesis as a theological lens through which to reinterpret ancient cosmological theories, for example, echoes Clement's approach discussed in Chapter Three. Also, as David Runia pointed out, and again matching Clement's method, it shows Philonic influences.⁴¹ This understanding harks back to the topic of natural contemplation; I address Basil's input to this area towards the end of the present chapter.

33 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 54–65, 103–114.

34 This approach corresponds to his way of establishing doctrine on traditional grounds in *Spirit* 29.72.1–74.41.

35 Louth, "Basil and the Fathers," 69–71. Kathleen E. McVey, "The Use of Stoic Cosmogony in Theophilus of Antioch's *Hexaemeron*," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 32–58, esp. 32–33.

36 For a synthesis of these challenges, see Louth, "The Six Days," 41. For Theophilus' impact upon Basil's thinking in *Hexaemeron*, see Giet, "Introduction," 35, 52–56; Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 349, 352, 353, 357, 362, 381, 394; McConnell, *Illumination*, 77, 149; Rousseau, *Basil*, 323 n. 22; Voicu, "Crearea lumii," 182, 184–185; Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 37.

37 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 68–72. McVey, "Stoic Cosmogony," 32–58. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 110–116. D.S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A study of early Christian thought in the East* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 43–45.

38 *To Autolytus* 3.3.1–11. For the impact of this passage on Basil, see Giet's note in *Homélie sur l'Hexaéméron* 1.2, at 92 n. 3. Basil defends a similar position in *Hexaemeron* 3.3.3–16.

39 McVey, "Stoic Cosmogony," 43–46, 49–53.

40 Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 20.

41 Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 235–241.

Before I consider the details of his approach, a clarification regarding his use of scientific data is in order. However impressive this might have been for the first readers of *Hexaemeron* and up to the dawn of modernity, Basil's descriptions of the natural world cannot be taken wholesale. The sciences to which he refers in *Hexaemeron* are largely obsolete; to paraphrase Lovecraft, they "crumbled under the slow yet mighty pressure of time,"⁴² being swept away by the tides of scientific advance. Let's take the clearest example. We read that species do not change and that extinctions are impossible;⁴³ scientific evidence points to the contrary. It is true—as Werner Heisenberg and Michio Kaku observed—that certain ancient intuitions about the deepest levels of reality anticipate contemporary fundamental physics.⁴⁴ In this case, Basil's cosmology and Clement's "string theory" discussed in Chapter Two, therefore, may be only partially inadequate. But nothing of the biology, chemistry, and cosmography on which he and his patristic sources relied pass the test of modern science. His homilies therefore cannot claim to be scientifically normative, and no opinion against current scientific knowledge can be based on them.

Does this mean then that they are completely irrelevant? Not at all! We shall discover below that, despite his late antique contextualisation, Basil maintained his theological independence from the science to which he referred. My findings confirm Lossky's conclusion that the patristic worldview was essentially unaffected by the cultural paradigms it engaged.⁴⁵ John Meyendorff drew the same conclusion for Basil, that he remained "theologically independent from his non-Biblical sources."⁴⁶ While *Hexaemeron* does not count towards the development of science, what makes it relevant to Christian audiences throughout history is its being anchored in the scriptural doctrine of creation. It follows that his theological positions should be received as such, whereas his apologetic stances must be translated into, or replaced by, the scientific idiom of our time. I addressed this and related matters in a recent contribution.⁴⁷

42 Lovecraft, "The Alchemist," 6.

43 *Hexaemeron* 9.2.15–18. Scholars have not missed this matter. Clapsis, "Cosmology," 215. Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 69; *The Doctrine of Creation*, 58–59.

44 Kaku, *Parallel Worlds*, 17–18, 196–198. Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, WP (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 61.

45 Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 104–106.

46 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 134.

47 See my forthcoming chapter, "One Description, Multiple Interpretations: Suggesting a Way Out of the Current Impasse," in *Eastern Orthodoxy and the Sciences: Theological, Philosophical, Scientific and Historical Aspects of the Dialogue*, ed. Christopher Knight and Alexei Nesteruk, SOC 2 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2021).

These reservations aside, any Christian from the past, present, or the future might well cherish his sense of wonder before “the order of things visible” or the finely tuned parameters of the universe seen as an embodiment of God’s wisdom,⁴⁸ the realistic assessment of creation’s natural mortality,⁴⁹ and the ethical lessons inferred from animal and plant behaviours.⁵⁰ His sense that the cosmos is truly “worthy of wonder”⁵¹ corresponds to the sentiment of many contemporary cosmologists.⁵² Also, his conviction that the human being and the cosmos are ontologically and teleologically connected⁵³ remains valid in the contemporary framework of the anthropic principle. Above all, his approach constitutes an inspiring example of how the Christian worldview can intersect with a given scientific framework. To this matter I must now turn.

1.1 *Christian Worldview and Science*

Despite the obsolescence of its scientific basis, Basil’s interdisciplinary articulation of the Christian worldview stands as an outstanding achievement. It crowns the efforts of a Christian bishop profoundly committed to establishing a fruitful conversation between theology and culture, including the scientific representations of reality. In what follows I examine details of his approach.

As with Clement, and other traditional predecessors, his openness towards the sciences reflects his polymath training. Significantly, in *Address* as well

48 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.2. See Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 69–70. Concerning other Basilian terms for cosmic order, see Kustas, “Saint Basil,” 239–241.

49 *Hexaemeron* 1.3.11–19; 5.2.38–49. See Clapsis, “Cosmology,” 217–218. The natural mortality of the creation marks its difference from the divine creator. Hildebrand (*Trinitarian Theology*, 109, 115–116) pointed out that this and similar statements show Basil’s care not to allow the creation, in this case the sun, to be considered divine.

50 *Hexaemeron* 1.4.21–24; 5.6.33–81; 9.3.4–84. Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 136. Andrew J. Brown, *The Days of Creation: A History of Christian Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3*, HBT 4 (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2014), 31–32. Callahan, “Greek Philosophy,” 51–52. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 117, 135. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 319–320. Rousseau, “Human Nature,” 227–228, 231–232. Voicu, “Crearea lumii,” 186.

51 θαυμάσαι ἄξιον (*Hexaemeron*, 1.7.43). See Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 9–10.

52 A great many scientists of our age entertain a mystical sense of the universe’s meaningfulness. Here are a few examples. Barrow, *The Constants of Nature*, 97–118 (regarding the coincidence of the universe’s constants). Davies, *The Mind of God*, 78–80 (regarding the rationality of the ordered universe). Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, 61 (regarding the compatibility between the quantum vision of reality and ancient intuitions). Nicolescu, *Nous, la particule et le monde*, 185–190 (regarding the traditional ways in which quantum physicists depict the subatomic world). Trinh Xuan Thuan, *La mélodie secrète: Et L’Homme créa l’Univers* (France: Fayard, 1988), 277–297 (regarding the teleological dimension of the universe’s fine-tuning).

53 *Hexaemeron* 1.4.16–21.

as in *Hexaemeron* he intimates that his own education mirrors the progression of Moses from the ancient curriculum to theology or divine wisdom.⁵⁴ Indeed, he turned to theology only after solid studies in the classical tradition, without ever desisting from being a seeker of knowledge.⁵⁵ But the two works mentioned just above make plain that a sharp discernment always attends his appreciation for the sciences and for culture more broadly. He discusses the need for this discernment in the prologue of *Address*, where he outlines the discriminative approach to literature,⁵⁶ giving concrete examples of how this should be working.⁵⁷ Discernment teaches one to ignore the morally questionable parts and to accept the parts that praise virtue. *Address* is entirely an exercise in cultural discernment. *Hexaemeron*, in turn, does not contain an explicit discussion of this kind. Nevertheless, here, Basil conveys such discernment implicitly, by emphasising the competences of theology and science. Paralleling the cultural sagacity he shows so well in *Address*, his assessment of scientific theories in *Hexaemeron* is nuanced. The homilies deploy abundant scientific information for describing the natural world, but they reject the atheistic, pantheistic, and materialistic formulations of science. Rejection occurs on scripturally supported theological grounds. It also involves methodological distinctions which, for some reason, remain concealed.

The most obvious distinction refers to the ancient blending of scientific data and ideological beliefs. Christian theology must disentangle the scientific data from ideological noise, to appreciate science and to discard ideology. For example, it retains the scientific view of the ordered universe while rejecting the ancient belief that the universe is divine. But then theology has to reinterpret the scientific description of the world through the lens of its own criteria. Since theology is not meant to produce another cosmology, it appropriates the available model of reality and then redrafts it from the vantage point of the doctrine of creation. This approach is not syncretistic. Nor is it without traditional antecedents. Genesis itself pioneers the way for it by redrawing ancient Near and Middle Eastern cosmological images in the light of a new doctrine of cre-

54 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.18–22. *Address* 3.11–15. For a recent reappraisal of this little treatise, see Dumitrașcu, *Basil the Great*, 149–154. For Basil mirroring Moses, see Olga Alieva, “Moses in the Wilderness: Basil of Caesarea on Formation of the Prophet,” *Scrinium* 15 (2019): 133–142, esp. 140.

55 Costache, “Christian Gnosis,” 262. Dumitrașcu, *Basil the Great*, 144–148. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 188. Lee, “Why Didn’t St Basil Write in New Testament Greek?” 71–74. Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 8–9. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 10–11, 27. Radde-Gallwitz, *Divine Simplicity*, 126.

56 *Address* 1.1–8, 20–29.

57 *Address* 2.26–47; 3.1–18; 4.1–54.

ation. Closer to home, the New Testament borrows the Hellenic concepts of the Logos and the fundamental principles in order to articulate the Christian doctrine of creation. However, what prevents Basil from slipping into unwarranted amalgamations is yet another methodological distinction, between the competences of theology and science. Science operates analytically and descriptively, theology works symbolically and hermeneutically. Description and interpretation are not the same. Nor are the specific questions addressed by science and theology: what is it and who made it, respectively. But distinction is not severance. And so, while observing the methodological difference, Basil approaches his subject in a complex fashion—descriptively and hermeneutically, explicitly and interpretively, scientifically and theologically.

Such methodological distinctions account for his accommodation of scientific data within the rigorous framework of his theological worldview, following the traditional antecedents reviewed in the previous chapters. These distinctions explain furthermore why he does not follow Tertullian and Tatian in their opposition to the culture of their time,⁵⁸ despite his own critique of certain physical theories.⁵⁹ And while sometimes he attacks science, as certain scholars have noticed,⁶⁰ that is in contexts of discerning the competences of theology and science. In such instances, he disallows to sciences the aptitude to pronounce judgments on matters outside their descriptive purview, namely, on theological matters. In short, Basil follows the sciences in describing natural phenomena, while interpreting everything from a theological stance.

This method deserves closer examination. Throughout *Hexaemeron*, one discovers Basil's interest in and approval of the scientific descriptions of observable realities—from astronomical bodies to natural phenomena to plant life to

58 At least this is the established view regarding the two second century authors. Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 39. Lindberg, "Early Christian Attitudes," 49–50; "Medieval Science and Religion," in *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 57–72, esp. 60. Quasten, *Patrology* 1:221–223; 2:247, 320–321. I must point out, however, that Tertullian's oft-quoted stance from *On the Pretences of the Heretics* 7 about "Athens" (philosophy, science) and "Jerusalem" (faith, theology) does not concern philosophy. It refers to erroneous Christian beliefs that draw on philosophy rather than on the apostolic doctrine. Regarding Tatian, a recent study brought to the fore the complexity of his approach, irreducible to a wholesale rejection of science and culture. See Allan T. Georgia, "The Monster at the End of His Book: Monstrosity as Theological Strategy and Cultural Critique in Tatian's *Against the Greeks*," *J ECS* 26:2 (2018): 191–219.

59 Lindberg, "Early Christian Attitudes," 50–51.

60 Giet, "Introduction," 44–46, 72–73. Puech, *Histoire de la littérature*, 255–257. Voicu, "Crearea lumii," 181–182. These scholars refer to Basil's double approach to the sciences as an inconsistency, without considering the details.

animal physiology and behaviour.⁶¹ We have seen above that, although he did not record his sources, contemporary research confirms his abundant use of scientific information. This evidence refutes groundless generalisations such as the hypothesis of an early Christian worldview that developed “wholly at odds with the cosmology and anthropology of the Greek ancients.”⁶² At least, this assessment is inapplicable in Basil’s case. Except for ideological views which contradicted the Christian doctrine of creation—which he relentlessly rebuts—he considers the scientific knowledge of his time both accurate and useful.⁶³ For example, he never objects to the geocentric model and the spheres of the Ptolemaic system,⁶⁴ which are foreign to Scripture and the Christian creed. He asserts, instead, that physics and cosmology complement the Genesis narrative of creation. Here is a relevant passage.

When he (namely, Moses) said, “In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth,” he passed over in silence many things, such as water, air, and fire, out of which (created beings) happen to be produced. All these (elements) which completed the cosmos obviously existed, beyond any doubt, but the story left them out so that our mind can exercise its skills by inferring the rest from little pointers.⁶⁵

It is clear from this excerpt that, following Origen,⁶⁶ Basil does not regard Genesis as a rigorous and complete scientific account. It is also clear that, given its incompleteness, only assiduous study of the available information can lead to a fuller worldview. This he suggests through reference to the “little pointers” in the narrative which, corresponding to known heuristic devices, invite an

61 *Hexaemeron* 3.4–5; 4.2,6; 5.2–3; 7.1–2 etc. See Christopher Knight, “Natural Theology and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, ed. by Russell Re Manning (Oxford University Press, 2013), 213–226, esp. 216.

62 Gregory Telepneff and Bishop Chrysostomos, “The Transformation of Hellenistic Thought on the Cosmos and Man in the Greek Fathers,” *PBR* 9:2–3 (1990): 123–134, esp. 123. Similarly, Duhem, *Le système du monde*, 396, confused the Basilian diatribe against astrology with a rejection of science and, at 398–399, argued that the church fathers were not seriously interested in the ancient cosmologies. For nuanced views on this issue, see Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 51 and Harrison, *Territories*, 220 n. 124.

63 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 121. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 36.

64 *Hexaemeron* 1.3–4; 3.3 etc. Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 9–10.

65 *Hexaemeron* 2.3,14–19.

66 Cf. *Principles* 1.pref.10.140–142 (we know that the angels and the stars are created, but we know nothing about when and how they were made). For Origen’s impact upon Basil’s thinking in *Hexaemeron*, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 317, 324, 333, 349, 353, 359–360, 375, 385–390.

explanation and development Scripture itself does not provide. Explanations may be found in science. Apposite in this case are the physics of the fundamental elements known to the ancients, water, air, and fire.⁶⁷ These intimations are of crucial significance for understanding his position regarding science and theology. By making use of the available knowledge, he sets a methodological precedent for augmenting the scriptural worldview through the available sciences. Gregory of Nyssa, I show in the next chapter, adopted the same approach soon after his brother's demise.

Basil's concern is to establish the theological view of creation, not to debate the validity of science. This overriding concern—rather a theological agenda—resonates with the pastoral and missional motivations of his approach, earlier discussed. His purpose is transparent in a couple of passages where he refutes the atheistic iteration of atomic theory without questioning the scientific worth of atomism as such. What matters to him is the assertion, anchored in scriptural wisdom, that the universe is divinely conditioned and purposeful.⁶⁸ In such passages he develops an earlier summary of the doctrine of creation, where he points out that “the creation of the heaven and the earth must be conveyed not as having happened spontaneously, as some imagined, but as having their cause from God.”⁶⁹ In agreement with the first verse of Genesis and its canonical paraphrase, the first article of the Nicene Creed, the sentence plainly states that whatever exists does so through creation. It has a divine cause. There is no suggestion in these passages that a theological narrative be substituted for a scientific description of reality. What they propose is the conviction that the object of scientific enquiry is God's creation.

Basil's appreciation for the sciences appears also in his assessment of natural phenomena as such, that is, *natural*. While always aware of God's permeating energy, he refuses to supply mythical or supernatural explanations of physical occurrences. Instead, he affirms the natural character of created existence. The following anthropological, astrophysical, and cosmological examples perfectly illustrate his standpoint. Moses is by nature inclined to love justice.⁷⁰ The sun does not receive warmth from elsewhere, being naturally hot.⁷¹ The Holy Spirit

67 For an analysis of Basil's use of the fundamental elements in his interpretation of Genesis, see Callahan, “Greek Philosophy,” 40–48. For a similar discussion regarding Basil's view of the gaps in the narrative, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 314–316.

68 *Hexaemeron* 1.2.5–20; 1.11.1–42. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 116. Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 11–12.

69 Οὐρανοῦ γὰρ καὶ γῆς ποίησις παραδίδοσθαι μέλλει, οὐκ αὐτομάτως συνενεχθεῖσα, ὥς τινες ἐφαντάσθησαν, παρὰ δὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὴν αἰτίαν λαβοῦσα (*Hexaemeron* 1.1.3–5).

70 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.25–29.

71 *Hexaemeron* 3.7.45–47. The context shows Basil arguing as a scientist in favour of the sun's

activates the nature of the waters for the germination of life, but their fertility is a natural attribute.⁷² *Hexaemeron* abounds in similar references, all describing a world governed by the natural laws.⁷³ Basil's preference for natural explanations inspired his Cappadocian confrères, and was successfully handed on to various Byzantine theologians.⁷⁴ I return to his concept of nature in the section on the principle of synergy. Suffice it to point out here that for him nature—similar to the classical naturalists who inspired him⁷⁵—was much richer than its ideologically fraught and stripped down modern version.⁷⁶

So far we have discovered that Basil was a critical adherent to the available description of the universe, whence he borrowed only what suited the Christian worldview, that is, the relevant science. His consistent recourse to scientific information meant to complement the Genesis narrative of creation, which does not address natural phenomena. In so doing, he transposed the scriptural doctrine of creation into terms familiar to his audiences. All this amounted to proposing a theological interpretation of science as well as rendering the Christian worldview in the language of science. As Bradbury would say, he “combined science and religion so the two worked side by side, neither denying the other, each enriching the other.”⁷⁷ The major obstacle for this double strike is that scientific knowledge had been ideologically hijacked. This matter, to which I must now turn, requires further attention.

1.2 *Disentangling Science from Ideology*

Basil's appreciation for the natural sciences is but one side of his approach. The other side is his rejection of the religious and philosophical ideologies which

natural warmth. This is not the only place where he displays scientific aptness. In *Hexaemeron* 1.3.1–15, he dismantles in advance Hawking's proposal that when it is represented as a circle—or a sphere—the universe has no beginning. See Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, 141–144.

72 *Hexaemeron* 2.6.19–25.

73 George Karamanolis and Daniel L. Schwartz, “Basil of Caesarea (Kappadokia) (ca 365–379 CE),” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Natural Scientists: The Greek Tradition and Its Many Heirs*, ed. Paul T. Keyser and Georgia L. Irby-Massie (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 189–190.

74 Doru Costache, “Queen of the Sciences? Theology and Natural Knowledge in St Gregory Palamas' *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*,” *TSR* 3 (2008): 27–46, esp. 32–33, 38–99. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 132–134. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 31, 100, 105 etc.

75 See the contributions to *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Natural Scientists*. Cf. Harrison, *Territories*, 24–25.

76 See Bruce V. Foltz, *The Noetics of Nature: Environmental Philosophy and the Holy Beauty of the Visible*, GEIPT (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 208.

77 Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 86–87.

had confiscated the available scientific information. Both the appreciations and the rejections belong to his exercise of cultural discernment, discussed above, especially his discrimination between analysis and interpretation, and even more between science and ideology. These distinctions allowed him to adopt a similar strategy to his predecessors—the early Christian apologists—who sought to bridge theology and philosophy by criticising popular religion.⁷⁸ Adapting this strategy to his own purposes, he refuted atheism, materialism, and pantheism as contrary to divine revelation and as distortions of genuine science. Accordingly, he unequivocally asserted that what causes inconsistencies in the scientific narrative is the ideological garbling of the available data. It is logical therefore that the *physiologoi* abandon unprofitable viewpoints and—though not an easy square to circle—partner with the theologians who could redress the situation.

The first target of his critique is atheism. The following passage denounces the atheistic assumptions of certain schools, such as the atomistic one, which had reduced cosmic existence to random natural events severed from all divine causation. I mentioned this passage in the preceding section as an illustration of Basil's theological stance which does not involve the wholesale rejection of science. What must be rebutted is atheism, which renders science lame, blind, and incoherent. When untainted by ideology, scientific enquiry fits the Christian worldview. So he introduces his diatribe against atheism:

The sages of the Greeks endeavoured to elaborate many (theories) about nature (περὶ φύσεως), but not one idea of theirs remained unmoved and unshaken, another refuting the previous one. Since it suffices that they overthrow one another, we do not have to do anything to discredit their (theories). (What matters here is that) by not knowing God (Θεὸν ἀγνοῦσαντες) they could not gather that an intelligent cause (αἰτίαν ἔμφορνα) preceded the creation of all. They drew their conclusions from their initial ignorance (concerning God).⁷⁹

A succinct review of theories about nature, matter, and atoms follows this passage.⁸⁰ Heeding his own warning, Basil does not consider these theories in detail, but the list provided shows his awareness of the topic. What he does, instead, is point out that these theories are contradictory and equally ignorant of God's activity within the creation. His approach, here, draws from one of

⁷⁸ Norris, "The apologists," 36–37, 39, 42–43.

⁷⁹ *Hexaemeron* 1.2.5–12.

⁸⁰ *Hexaemeron* 1.2.12–20.

the distinctions discussed above, between science and theology. A theologian is not called to dispute the validity of scientific enquiry: “we do not have to do anything to discredit their theories.” To debate science is a task reserved for scientists. As for the theologian—whether scientifically trained or not—he or she upholds theological positions. The problem is that what hindered the ancient naturalists from grasping the “intelligent cause” (αἰτία ἔμφορα) of the cosmos is their theological ignorance (see Θεὸν ἀγνοήσαντες).⁸¹ And since the “intelligent cause” imparts the rationality of the ordered universe, that they do not know it means that they never arrive at a comprehensive view of reality. Opposition to Christian theology, therefore, is quite unwarranted.

One cannot miss the nuance that Basil is implicitly inviting scientists and theologians alike to observe the competence of their respective fields. Science deciphers the message—mathematical or otherwise—written in nature. Theology contemplates the writer of the message present in the nature of things. His equitable solution must have defused the conflict, at least for those who heeded his advice. But his clarifications are also relevant to our own time, which burns with the fire of culture wars. Indeed, certain scientists hurl ideological pronouncements while certain theologians issue statements of pretended scientific significance. Since both parties mistake their own competences, they could learn much from the above passage.

Perhaps less inspired is Basil’s conclusion that atheism led ancient naturalists to contradiction.⁸² But this conclusion should not be taken at face value. Corresponding to Clement’s view of Abraham and Moses, discussed in Chapter Three, he does not demand from scientists to abandon research, to learn theology instead. What he does is express the conviction that contradiction is unavoidable if they fail to observe the universe’s rationality, obvious in the patterns in which all things converge. He points out furthermore that to perceive cosmic rationality they must grasp the divine source of that rationality, the “intelligent cause,” which transcends scientific expertise. Since theology is not equipped for debating the validity of science, Basil’s criticism could not be meant for science itself. He undoubtedly aims it at the atheism which had hijacked cosmological theories.

81 “Not knowing God.” *Hexaemeron* 1.2.10.

82 However, his position seems to echo the ancient sceptical tradition which—since at least Plato’s *Theaetetus* onwards—criticised the disagreements between the philosophical systems. See Mi-Kyoung Lee, “Antecedents in early Greek philosophy,” and Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson, “Pyrrho and early Pyrrhonism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13–35, 36–57.

This position is not original. Various early Christian theologians adopted similar strategies. In the passage under consideration he seems to rehearse Theophilus' position, mentioned above, that atheism led to contradictions amidst the classical theories.⁸³ The overlap of the two passages is unmistakable. Another possible source, closer to Basil's time and usually ignored, is Athanasius' attack on Epicurean cosmology.⁸⁴ Athanasius notices that the Epicureans deny divine providence and assert the autonomy of the universe. Accordingly, he opposes their position with a worldview centred on God's creative and provident agency.⁸⁵ The connection with Athanasius is more obvious when one reads *Hexaemeron* 1.2.5–12 together with the beginning of the same first homily, quoted above, where Basil outlines the doctrine of creation through divine causation.⁸⁶ What matters is that—following such traditional antecedents, and whether or not his formulation is inspired—he links the inconsistencies of ancient theories with the theological ineptitude of their proponents.

We already know that, in so doing, Basil does not jettison ancient cosmology. The passage under consideration, its context, and other instances where he criticises the classical model⁸⁷ do not suggest any intentions to propose a different description of reality. By the standards of the time, the established description was valid, even were the *physiologoi* to work out a more coherent worldview. Later on we shall discover that what he proposes is to redefine nature and the related concepts of natural laws and natural power, but not to change cosmography. The above analysis makes clear that, while he adopts the available map of the universe, he demands that atheism be abandoned in favour of theological insights. His solution is reminiscent of Clement's approach to natural contemplation; it involves recourse to Genesis, but not its use as a presumed scientific textbook. What Basil does is affirm divine agency

83 *To Autolycus* 3.3.1–11.

84 *Incarnation* 2.1–3. The influence of Athanasius upon Basil's thought did not escape certain scholars though. Kannengiesser, *Handbook*, 741. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 207–208. The relation between the two theologians is complex; Athanasius himself was a prudent supporter of his younger colleague. See Uta Heil, "Athanasius und Basilius," *ZAC* 10 (2006): 103–120, esp. 113–119.

85 *Gentiles* 41–42.

86 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.3–5. Basil refutes the concept of uncreated matter both here and in *Hexaemeron* 2.2. Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 133. Gunton, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 59. Marinescu, "Despre lumină," 251. Voicu, "Crearea lumii," 189. Basil's unwavering commitment to the doctrine of creation leaves no room for speculations such as those of Danezis et al. ("The Hexaemeron," 105–106), who suggest that he entertained the notion of eternal matter.

87 *Hexaemeron* 3.8.37–49; 9.1.22–35.

in a scriptural sense, without replacing the received model by an alternative scriptural “science.” Genesis tells a theological, not scientific, story of the creation.⁸⁸ It is not about the universe’s shape and nature that so much interested the ancient natural philosophers. Genesis provides guidance and edification for God’s people.⁸⁹ Its function is to provide theological insights instrumental towards interpreting scientific cosmology. It is from the theological message which Genesis conveys that Basil draws his rebuttal of ideology. In short, he presents the *physiologoi* with an alternative interpretation of the data, contrary to their customary atheism.

This is not Basil’s only line of attack. His strategy for disentangling science from ideology does not consider only the damage inflicted by the latter upon the former. No, this is an illegitimate alliance leading to the collapse of the values and the meanings in society and culture. In this vein he mentioned the failure of certain ancient theories to appreciate the beauty of the ordered universe as denoting divine wisdom and the creation’s call to permanence and fulfilment.⁹⁰ One such theory is the Stoic one, with its cycles of conflagration and rebirth.⁹¹ If the world is impermanent, so are the values upheld by people living in this world. And as these values dissolve, so too dissipates the meaning of human life. One may be surprised at the attack of Basil on Stoic cosmology, given that Stoic ethics nurtured early Christian ethics itself. His own esteem for Stoicism under this aspect is well documented.⁹² As David Bradshaw pointed out, his critique must have originated in the theological and philosophical conviction that—absent a solid doctrine of creation—axiology and ethics could claim neither consistency nor authority.⁹³ What undermined Stoic ethics therefore was its cosmological “framing.” As a remedy, the scriptural doctrine of creation reveals that beauty and order are not the product of random forces and

88 *Hexaemeron* 1.2.26–48; 1.11.42–57; 6.2.18–19. See also the homily, sometimes attributed to him, *On the Origin of Humanity* 1.4 (PG 30, 13CD). For an English version of this homily, see *St Basil the Great: On the Human Condition*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 31–48, esp. 33. John Chrysostom nurtured similar convictions in *Genesis* 2.2 (PG 53, 28). See Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 132, 135 and Stramara, “Surveying the Heavens,” 153.

89 *Hexaemeron* 9.1.22–40.

90 *Hexaemeron* 3.10.1–18. Basil’s appreciation of the beauty of creation did not escape scholars. Callahan, “Greek Philosophy,” 49–51. Foltz, *Noetics of Nature*, 209, 235. Louth, “Basil and the Fathers,” 76–77.

91 *Hexaemeron* 3.8.41–49.

92 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 47–51, 56, 73, 115–116. Kustas, “Saint Basil,” 245–246, 273–274. Radde-Gallwitz, *Divine Simplicity*, 120–121 n. 21, 127–128. Rist, “Basil’s Neoplatonism,” 212–213.

93 Bradshaw, “Plato in the Cappadocians,” 196.

events. Since the universe is God's creation, an "intelligent cause" configures its order and beauty, so that permanence, values, and meaning are guaranteed. Of course, the ordered, beautiful, and meaningful universe had a beginning of its existence and so is perforce mortal, but it is not destined to annihilation precisely because its order, beauty, and meaningfulness bear the signature of God's wisdom. Together with the universe and human existence, the values and the meaning of life are assured. Either way, cosmology and ethics hold together and only a searching theological interpretation can render the scientific narrative serviceable for meaning and ethical values.

Basil observes that perfection as the final term of the cosmos is encoded in the very first words of the creation narrative. Genesis confirms what cosmic order has always proclaimed:

The statement by anticipation of the dogmas regarding the world's consummation and transformation is now handed on briefly by way of the fundamentals pertaining to the divinely inspired teaching: In the beginning God made.⁹⁴

Here reverberates Origen's reference to the eschatological perfection, discussed in Chapter Three, through a protological metaphor. Basil's approach is totally at odds with the popular view that he read the scriptural narrative literally.⁹⁵ Reversing Origen's take on Gen 11,⁹⁶ he understands the narrative's opening as metaphorically mapping the Christian worldview from inception to consummation and therefore as a prophetic utterance (προαναφώνησις) regarding the eschaton. He probably reads the phrase together with Rev 21:1, but does not mention this connection here. Nevertheless, within this broader scriptural context he takes the phrase as intimating that what begins to exist and is naturally

94 Προαναφώνησις τῶν περὶ συντελείας δογμάτων καὶ περὶ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου μεταποιήσεως, τὰ νῦν ἐν βραχείᾳ κατὰ τὴν στοιχειώσιν τῆς θεοπνεύστου διδασκαλίας παραδιδόμενα. Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός (*Hexaemeron* 1.3.16–20).

95 The claim that his interpretative method is literal takes as a pretext his statement about grass in *Hexaemeron* 9.1.19–21; however, he interprets grass spiritually in *Hexaemeron* 5.2.38–49. A number of scholars pointed out Basil's preference for the spiritual interpretation. Blowers, *Drama*, 128. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 391–392. Louth, "The Cappadocians," 294. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:217. Lucian Turcescu, "Gregory of Nyssa's Biblical Hermeneutics in *De Opificio Hominis*," in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11–13 October 2006*, ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu, BAC 6 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 511–526, esp. 512.

96 *Principles* 3.5.4 (reading the eschatological future into a protological narrative). See Behr, "Introduction," lxiii–lxiv.

mortal, namely, the universe, is not destined to extinction. On the contrary, what awaits the universe is fulfilment (συντελεία) and transformation (μεταποίησης). So understood, prophetically and allegorically, the first line of Genesis and the narrative of creation in its entirety concern not only past events; they also reveal the promise of a glorious future for God's creation. In so doing, the scriptural narrative confirms what the creator conveys through the rationality and the beautiful order of the cosmos. And as cosmic order denotes the universe's permanence, so cosmic permanence assures the meaningfulness of existence and the values. Accordingly, Basil concludes the same first homily by exhorting the audience to learn from the wisdom embodied in the ordered universe and so to walk steadfastly on the path of virtue.⁹⁷

Basil's scripturally grounded convictions concerning the creation are what elicit his critique of the scientific representation of the world, insofar as that representation is ideologically fraught and deleterious in regard to ethical criteria. Even ideology he rejects not as a matter of principle, but because it negatively impacts human life.⁹⁸ Against the case in point, that is, Stoic cosmology and its axiological ramifications, he depicts a universe divinely designed to reach perfection and immortality. This melioristic universe, echoing Origen's, safeguards the permanence of values and meanings. Here, Basil anticipates by more than a millennium and a half the anthropic cosmological principle—its final or teleological version—which postulates the survival of values in future ages.⁹⁹

Before moving any further, I must pause to address a matter not unrelated to the topic at hand. Unlike our discoveries so far, Philip Rousseau pictured the eschatological fulfilment of the creation in Basil as “a return to a world that was invisible and eternal,” an “ancient fatherland” construed as heavenly and disembodied.¹⁰⁰ But the phrase “ancient fatherland”¹⁰¹ is not encountered in *Hexaemeron* and within its own setting it refers to the paradisiac cosmos of

97 *Hexaemeron* 3.10.18–41.

98 Even without being quoted in this regard, his position still reverberates in the official stances of the Orthodox Church on the negative impacts of ideology and technology. See Doru Costache, “Orthodoxy and Science: Insights from the Holy and Great Council,” *ER* 72:3 (2020): 396–408, esp. 403, 404, 406, 407.

99 Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 23, 184, 615.

100 Rousseau, *Basil*, 320. For contrary views, see Anastos, “Basil's Κατὰ Εὐνομίαν,” 101 and Johannes Zachhuber, “Stoic Substance, Non-Existing Matter? Some Passages in Basil of Caesarea Reconsidered,” *SP* 41 (2006): 425–430.

101 The text reads: τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἐπιζητούμεν πατρίδα, τὸν παράδεισον, ὃν ἐφύτευσεν ὁ Θεὸς ἐν Ἐδέμ κατ' ἀνατολὰς (“we seek the ancient fatherland, the paradise, which God has planted in Eden, to the east”; *Spirit* 27.66.61–63).

Gen 2, not an immaterial reality. In fact, *Hexaemeron* mentions the “Jerusalem above” as “true fatherland,”¹⁰² explicitly evoking the transformed creation of Rev 21–22, traces of which can be discerned in the previously analysed passage. This, again, is not a disembodied reality. Against this backdrop, had Basil used the phrase “ancient fatherland” in *Hexaemeron* it would not have been in Rousseau’s sense. A return to an immaterial universe would annul Basil’s critique of the Stoic worldview and its implications.

In short, to articulate the Christian worldview in a way that satisfied his audiences, namely, Hellenistic Christians, also to counteract various circumstantial factors that caused imbalance to his community, Basil combined scientific data and a considered hermeneutical approach to the Genesis narrative of creation. This amounted to contextualising the scriptural message against the available science as well as reinterpreting the latter theologically. This task would have been impossible without dissociating scientific knowledge from its ideological entanglements, and without implicitly validating science through insertion into the Christian representation of reality. All this required, alongside discernment, courage. The latter is obvious in the refutation of ideology as blinding science and as affecting human wellbeing—and in the exhortation of Christians that they be informed regarding the natural world. On consistently theological foundations, Basil advocated the values, the meaning of life, and a purposeful universe. Drawing on earlier contributions, his achievements delineated a traditional way of treating matters whose potential for further theological engagements of science is unmistakeable. Remarkably, a series of modern scholars took their cue from his approach in their dealings with the new scientific culture.¹⁰³

I have already mentioned, twice, that the Basilian concept of “nature” is richer than its modern counterpart and that it denotes interactivity. This concept of nature lies at the heart of his development of the Christian worldview at the crossroads of theology and science. To this I must now turn.

102 ἀληθινὴ σου πατρίς ἢ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ (*Hexaemeron* 9.2.45).

103 Clapsis, “Cosmology,” 216–217. Knight, “Natural Theology,” 216, 224–225. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 106. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 134. Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, CGT 5 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 97–99, 102–103. Nesteruk, *The Sense of the Universe*, 415–416. Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 46.

2 The Interactive Dynamic of Nature

From the various aspects pertaining to the Christian worldview on which Basil elaborated, in what follows I address an aspect largely ignored by contemporary scholarship, namely, the interactive or synergetic dynamic of nature.¹⁰⁴ Corresponding to his analogy between the solar rays and the active presence of the Holy Spirit,¹⁰⁵ for Basil the ordered universe constitutes a vast open field where the divine and the cosmic energies creatively converge, synergising. The universe is not a ready-made, autonomous, and self-contained reality. It is an emergent phenomenon and a work in progress. Mobilised by God's ongoing activity, it is powered to unfold in harmony with the divine purpose. Basil's grasp of cosmic dynamism is above all theological, emphasising the divine conditioning of the creation. He actually likens the cosmos to a "grand and complex workshop of the divine creative action."¹⁰⁶ But his position is not solely theological; it allies to his interdisciplinary appraisal of the cosmos. It therefore consists in a theological representation of reality described by the available sciences. In so doing, his approach coheres with the views of his predecessors, Athanasius, Clement, and Origen.

I have already given several examples of naturalism in *Hexaemeron*, on which occasion I mentioned Basil's realistic assessment of created nature as inconsistent, bounded, and perishable. This realistic evaluation refers to the universe and all of its parts. Being ontologically contingent and naturally fragile—thus mortal and on its way to dissolution¹⁰⁷—the cosmos maintains its existence, evolves, and flourishes due to its receiving the constant support of divine energy. In Basil's words, "the creator's power" (δύναμις τοῦ κτίσαντος) or "the supporting power" (συνεκτική δύναμις) of God.¹⁰⁸ He gave a clearer account of creation's mortality in his *Homilies on the Psalms*:

104 For recent efforts to articulate related matters in cosmological and providential perspective, see Philip Clayton, "Evolution, Altruism, and God: Why the Levels of Emergent Complexity Matter," and Sarah Coakley, "Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence," in *Evolution, Games, and God*, 343–361, 375–385.

105 *Spirit* 9.22.35–40. Basil uses this image already in *Against Eunomius*. See David Bradshaw, "The Concept of the Divine Energies," *PhTh* 18:1 (2006): 93–120, esp. 106–108, 110–111.

106 τὸ μέγα τοῦτο καὶ ποικίλον τῆς θείας δημιουργίας ἐργαστήριον (*Hexaemeron* 4.1.23–24). Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 35, presented his notion of successive moments of creation as an anthropomorphic rendition of the facts.

107 *Hexaemeron* 1.3.11–16.

108 *Hexaemeron* 1.9.15–16; 1.9.26. The whole chapter is relevant here. Recent scholarship indirectly confirms Basil's standpoint. See Clayton, "Evolution," 348–349 and Coakley, "Evolution," 377–378, 380. Basil returns often to the aspect of dependence. For example, against the Manichaeans, in *Hexaemeron* 8.1.1–22, he defends the need for a divine input towards

This very world is mortal (θνητός) and a place of mortals (χωρίον ἀποθνησκόντων). Given that the constitution of things visible is complex (σύνθετός ἐστι) and that all composite thing must dissolve (διαλύεσθαι), they who are in the world (οἱ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ὄντες) and a part of the world (μέρη ὄντες τοῦ κόσμου), necessarily share in the universe's nature.¹⁰⁹

His position echoes the Athanasian view that, because of its mortality, created existence depends on God's continuous, permeating, and underpinning activity. According to the Alexandrian master, "when considered in itself, the nature of things that are being brought into being (in other words which have their existence out of nonbeing) is fluid, weak, and mortal (θνητή)"¹¹⁰ or again "fluid and dissolvable (διαλυομένην)."¹¹¹ Basil's terminology borrows from the Athanasian discourse. Either way, for Athanasius, as we know from Chapters Two and Four, on its own, the universe is unable to avoid annihilation, needing the "lordship, providence, and organising work of the Logos"¹¹² who "orders and holds all things together."¹¹³ It is the Logos who providentially takes care of the universe, "strengthening the creation into existence"¹¹⁴ and preventing it from relapsing into nothingness.¹¹⁵ In the same vein, Basil believes that "the divine Logos is nature (or: foundation) for the things that are brought into being."¹¹⁶ The Logos acts as a ground for all things and maintains the creation into existence. But this is where Basil's discourse takes an interesting turn, by proposing a synergetic view of nature.

2.1 *The Principle of Synergy*

Notwithstanding his overall agreement with Athanasius, Basil proposes a complex explanation for the existence and the movement of the creation. Thus, whereas Athanasius conceives of a cosmos that depends totally on God's sup-

activating the generative potential of the world. See Clapsis, "Cosmology," 217. Rousseau, *Basil*, 338–339.

109 *Homily on Psalm 114.5* (PG 29, 492CD).

110 *Gentiles* 41.10–12.

111 *Gentiles* 41.16–17.

112 *Gentiles* 41.23–24.

113 *Gentiles* 41.6–8.

114 *Gentiles* 41.19–20.

115 *Gentiles* 41.17–18.

116 ὁ θεῖος λόγος φύσις ἐστὶ τῶν γινομένων (*Hexaemeron* 8.1.14–15). In the seventh century, Maximus echoed this perception when he mentioned the participation of the creation in God through its natural movement. In his words, "in being and moving (all things) participate in God" (*Difficulty* 7.16).

port in order to be and to move, Basil emphasises the interactive dynamism of created reality. He elucidates this model in logical sequence, in tune with his views of the divine presence in the universe on a fundamental level. First, he points out that the cosmos is not independent of God's providential power. Second, drawing upon a richer understanding of nature, he shows that the cosmos is divinely endowed with its own motive and generative capacity. Third, given the ontological limitations of the creation—obvious in its fluid nature and its mortality—he asserts that its generative potential would have stayed latent, if not for the divine will and power that activates it. This amounts to saying that cosmic existence, movement, and fertility are outcomes of a profound interaction between divine and natural forces. The following passage perfectly illustrates this logic. Basil refers to the dry land of the third day of creation as experiencing fruitless labours,¹¹⁷ whose fertility was only activated by God's word:

“Let the earth bring forth!” Think together with me how the cold and ever struggling (earth) in the pangs of travail (ὠδίνουσας), being stirred up towards bearing fruit (πρὸς καρπογονίαν συγχινουμένην) at this small utterance and brief command (ἐκ μικρᾶς φωνῆς καὶ προστάγματος) produced myriads of sorts of plants. It was as though it cast away a gloomy and lamenting garb, and put on one instead that was brighter and adorned with appropriate ornaments.¹¹⁸

The reference to a cold and desolate earth betrays Basil's grappling with the then standard concept of inert matter, mechanically activated by exterior forces. Matter is inert. The same concept must have prompted Athanasius to affirm divine agency as the sole factor responsible for the preservation of the universe. In both cases the standard concept suited well the theological narrative of a divinely conditioned creation. But the above passage also discloses Basil's other conviction, namely, that the natural energies of the creation have a definite role to play within the universe and the emergence of life. The earth looks sterile only from a distance. At closer inspection it has a germinating power, struggling in the pangs of travail (ὠδίνουσα) and being stirred up towards bearing fruit (πρὸς καρπογονίαν συγχινουμένην). Basil presents likewise the waters of the fifth day of creation. They are not idle, but playing their part in the generation of life.¹¹⁹ Although its natural capacity for germination

117 The notion of creation's pangs or labours might draw on Rom 8:22.

118 *Hexaemeron* 5.2.29–35. Cf. *Hexaemeron* 8.1.1–19 (for the sixth day).

119 The text reads: “The commandment (πρόσταγμα) came and immediately the rivers be-

is God's gift, we are told in relation to the sixth day, created nature is innately fertile.¹²⁰ Lewis Ayres noted a tension in the Basilian statements about God's activity in the universe and nature's fecund powers.¹²¹ But these statements are not contradictory. As with Origen's mutually complementing assertions,¹²² the universe's generative capacity is both a gift from the creator and a natural law of the creation. These truths converge when considered from the vantage point of Basil's complex concept of nature and the principle of synergy. Creation's fecundity entails the interaction of God's supernatural energies, signified by the divine commandment (πρόσταγμα), and the universe's natural energies, signified by the pangs of childbirth (ᾠδίνουσα, from ᾠδίνω) experienced by the earth and the waters. Created nature is complex, dynamic, and synergetic.

This rich construct of nature as a dynamic and synergetic event surpasses any reductionist views of reality, both of his time and of our own. Nothing of his thinking lends support to either the naturalist stance of evolutionism or the supernaturalist position of creationism. His integrative solution has not escaped notice. In commenting on what he presented as a selection of passages from *Hexaemeron*,¹²³ Meyendorff pertinently observed that Basil asserts the divinely endowed natural capacity of the creation for movement and generation:

Affirming creation in time, Basil maintains the reality of a created movement and dynamism in creatures. The creatures do not simply receive their form and diversity from God; they possess an energy, certainly also God-given, but authentically their own.¹²⁴

Fuelling the movement of the creation, therefore, is its natural energy. Meyendorff added that Basil also believes in a continuous divine activity that gen-

came active (ἐνεργοί), and each pond produced beings that were proper to it and offspring according to its nature (κατὰ φύσιν). The sea was in travail (ᾠδίνε) with all sorts of swimming species. Not even the water's marshes and swamps were idle (οὐδὲ τοῦτο ἀργόν) or remained without participation in the completion of the creation (ἄμειρον τῆς κατὰ τὴν κτίσιν συντελείας)" (*Hexaemeron* 7.1.10–15).

120 See "Let the earth bring forth. Since it was made to possess what it did not have (ὁ μὴ ἔχει κτησάσθω), it was not as though it brought forth what it possessed. God gave it the power of activity (Θεοῦ δωρουμένου τῆς ἐνεργείας τὴν δύνανμιν)" (*Hexaemeron* 8.1.15–17).

121 Ayres, *Nicaea*, 315–316.

122 *Principles* 2.1.3.47–50, 57–58, 67–68; *Song* 3.210.4–8, 17–20.

123 Erroneously rendered as *PG* 29, 1160D. In fact, it is a reference to *PG* 29, 97B and some other portion of the text which I could not identify.

124 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 133.

erates and preserves the universe in existence, “but not at the expense of the world’s own created dynamism, which is part of the creative plan itself.”¹²⁵ Without naming the concept, these observations denote the principle of synergy.

In the same place, Meyendorff concluded that Basil’s perception of cosmic dynamism allows for an autonomous scientific investigation of nature. His conclusion lends indirect support to my earlier findings that *Hexaemeron* offers important guidelines for the theological engagement of contemporary science. This possibility should not be dismissed. One could trace, for instance, a correspondence between Basil’s energetic view of the universe and quantum cosmology. Precedents exist. Heisenberg discussed the similarity between quantum physics and the idea of Heraclitus that at its core reality is fire and movement.¹²⁶ Assuming that Heraclitus’ fire refers to what Basil designates as natural powers and energies—and allowing that Heraclitus’ fire matches the fundamental energy of quantum physics—then Basil’s energetic depiction of the creation corresponds to the quantum universe, too. Christos Yannaras already pointed out the affinity between the energetic universe of Basil’s theological heirs, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, and quantum physics.¹²⁷ He should have added Athanasius and Basil to the same list of patristic contributors. Immediately relevant, as Meyendorff noted, is Basil’s concept of a dynamic nature, enabling an articulation of the Christian worldview in the language of science.

On this note, I turn to further examples of creation’s interactive dynamism. In an early point about the generative capacities latent within the cosmos and their divine activation, Basil brings to the fore the principle of synergy by interpreting the Septuagint phrase “the earth was invisible and unstructured” (Gen 1:2). The passage addresses the status of chaotic matter before the emergence of the cosmos in a manner that corresponds to the cold earth whose fertility was activated by divine command.

Due to the latent potentiality (δύναμιν)¹²⁸ stored in it by the demiurge, (matter) was in painful labour (ὠδίνουσα) with the generation of all things

¹²⁵ Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 134.

¹²⁶ Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, 60–61, 67.

¹²⁷ Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 39–40.

¹²⁸ The word δύναμις can also be rendered as “power.” However, in the light of my earlier findings, “latent potentiality” seems more appropriate here. See the various meanings of δύναμις in H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised by H.S. Jones and R. McKenzie (Oxford University Press and Clarendon Press, 1996), 452.

(πάντων γένεσιν), waiting for the auspicious times when, by a divine call (τῷ θεῷ κελεύσματι), it would bring out into the open the things engendered within it (ἵνα προαγάγῃ ἐαυτῆς εἰς φανερόν τὰ κυήματα).¹²⁹

The suggestive metaphor of the pregnant chaos awaiting divine word echoes Hesiod's image of the wedding of sky and earth,¹³⁰ and Philo's notion of "procreative creation," as Runia calls it.¹³¹ Basil uses the trope of the cosmic wedding once again in *Hexaemeron*, to signify the intercourse of the fundamental elements.¹³² But the excerpt quoted above appears to be the only allusion to God as engaged with created matter in a connubial fashion. Unpacking this metaphor, the masculine principle, sc. the demiurge, lovingly impregnates the feminine principle, sc. created matter, by "storing in it" the power or the seeds of organisation. This is followed by the "divine call" or activation of creation's maternal or generative capacity. The connubial metaphor is consistent with the Basilian concept of "loving power" pertaining to the creation, which Lossky understood as creation's natural aptitude to be loved by God.¹³³

More importantly the excerpt under consideration conveys the same message as the one earlier analysed, on the divinely activated fecundity of the earth.¹³⁴ Thus, both passages illustrate the cooperation between created and uncreated forces. Basil iterates the same message, unambiguously, just before the last quoted passage. There he mentions the "efficacious power (δραστική δύναμις) of God" which joins with the "receptive nature (παθητική) of matter"¹³⁵ towards the establishment of the cosmos.

129 *Hexaemeron* 2.3.38–42. When he discussed the generative capacity of the earth as a divine gift, Rousseau (*Basil of Caesarea*, 339) missed the nuance of synergy introduced by this metaphor.

130 Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 43–46, 104–113, 126–138 etc. If Eliade was right to propose that for past traditional societies marriage reproduced "the hierogamy, more especially the union of heaven and earth," then Basil applies this very trope here in the correct manner. See Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 23.

131 See Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 422–423.

132 *Hexaemeron* 4.5.46–58.

133 Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 214. Lossky referred to a work whose title he did not indicate, but mentioned PG 31, 908CD. In reality, the phrase ἀγαπητική δύναμις is found in Basil's *Longer Rules by Way of Questions and Answers*, second question (PG 31, 909B).

134 *Hexaemeron* 5.2.29–35.

135 ἢ τε δραστική τοῦ Θεοῦ δύναμις, καὶ ἡ παθητικὴ φύσις τῆς ὕλης (*Hexaemeron* 2.3.6–7). The adjective παθητική can be also rendered by "passive." Given Basil's notion of a world open to God, "receptive" seems more appropriate.

Through the unfathomable interaction between the uncreated and the created, the pregnant chaos becomes the wellspring of the macrocosm and the matrix of the terrestrial ecosystem.¹³⁶ Basil surmises from this conclusion what Colin Gunton calls “the homogeneity of the creation”¹³⁷ and what contemporary science designates as the unity of nature. Homogeneity is foremost obvious in the replication of the initial processes that generated existence and order throughout the spacetime continuum. These processes, indeed, look almost identical. As contemporary cosmology asserts that the same quantum processes operating immediately after the Big Bang continue to do so in the background of the universe,¹³⁸ for Basil the fecund earth and the waters recast the primordial event of chaos’ pregnancy during the later stages of the creative project. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Obviously, Basil knows nothing of the modern creationist notion of discontinuity within the universe, where the creator makes things pop up into existence arbitrarily, without regard for the natural continuum. The classical examples are the human being having no relation to the “great link” of earthly life, and the sun being made out of thin air without countless supernovae supplying the stuff that made possible its birth. By contrast, Basil believes that God does not create things regardless of previous material structures and so, for him, what characterises the cosmos and everything within it is ontological solidarity. And while the creationist notion continues to be an apple of discord for scientists and theologians, his principle of synergy offers a superior solution to the situation. In short, alien as it is to the Basilian principle of synergy, contemporary creationism has no roots in the early Christian tradition.¹³⁹

Basil returned to the interaction of the divine and the cosmic energies in the fifth and the ninth homilies, presenting it as an ongoing phenomenon. But before I examine these other places, I must refer to a patristic interpretation of Gen 1:2 from roughly the same timeframe.

Basil’s younger contemporary, John Chrysostom, proposed a very similar understanding of the scriptural verse, yet he focused upon the image of the Spirit hovering over the waters. Together with Basil, he believed that the pri-

136 For further notes on the quoted passage, see Costache, “Apologetic, moral și mistic,” 44.

137 Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 71–73.

138 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary’s Handbook*, 180–181, 198–200, 253–255.

139 Costache, “The Orthodox Doctrine of Creation,” 44–45, 48, 50–52; “A Theology of the World,” 209–212, 218–220 (and the sources quoted there); “Theological Anthropology Today: Panayiotis Nellas’s Contribution,” in *Science and Orthodox Christianity: Past, Present, Future* (provisional title), ed. Haralampos Ventis and Kostas Tampakis (Brepols, forthcoming). Knight, “Natural Theology,” 213, 223–224.

mordial chaotic matter—signified by the element of water—was endowed with a generative potential. Here is the relevant passage.

What is being meant by this (scriptural) utterance, namely, “the Spirit of God hovered over the water”? I am of the opinion that it means this, that a living energy of sorts (ἐνέργειά τις ζωτική) was present in the waters. Water was not simply unmoved; it was both moving and endowed with a living power of sorts (ζωτικήν τινα δύναμιν). For what is immobile remains wholly useless, whereas what moves is serviceable.¹⁴⁰

John hints here at the principle of synergy to which Basil refers so consistently. A couple of differences are however discernible. First, he introduces the principle with reference to the Spirit’s active presence and the energetic or moving waters, not the divine commandment and the natural fecundity of the primordial chaotic matter. Second, the energetic waters of his interpretation—decidedly more dynamic than Basil’s painfully labouring earth—are better equipped for the work towards which the Spirit led them; there is no reference within the above passage to the pain of generation. Apart from these differences, both theologians believe that the emerging universe came to be ordered in synergistic fashion. This should not come as a surprise given that, very possibly, John had read *Hexaemeron*.

When he turns to the the Spirit hovering over the waters, Basil offers a similar interpretation—perfectly consistent with his other references to the principle of synergy—but by way of a different metaphor. Seeking support in the Syriac version of the scriptural text,¹⁴¹ he pictures the Spirit as a cosmic agent which, “after the image of a bird hatching the eggs, thoroughly warmed up (συνέθαλπε) and enlivened the nature of the waters (ἐζωογονεῖ τὴν τῶν ὑδάτων φύσιν), warming them inwardly by a living power of sorts (ζωτικήν τινα δύναμιν).”¹⁴² The image suggests the activity of the Spirit as some kind of radiation

¹⁴⁰ *Genesis* 3.1.40–46 (PG 53, 33).

¹⁴¹ This is not the only case when Basil looks beyond the Septuagint. In *Hexaemeron* 4.5.13–17 he mentions the absence of a certain line in other versions than what he uses, such as the Hebrew text. In turn, Chrysostom employs the Syriac reading of a passage in *Genesis* 4.4.12–17 (PG 53, 43). In Chapter Six, I refer to Gregory of Nyssa’s attempt at elucidating the same verse by comparing four Greek versions of the text.

¹⁴² *Hexaemeron* 2.6.20–22. Giet (“Introduction,” 54) proposed that this image originated with Theophilus of Antioch. Various scholars have discussed this matter. Monique Alexandre, *Le Commencement du Livre Genèse 1–v: La version grecque de la Septante et sa réception*, CA 3 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 86–87. Costache, “Apologetic, moral și mistic,” 45. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 113. Lim, “Politics,” 354. In a personal communication, Anna

TABLE 3 Corresponding metaphors

Source	<i>Hexaemeron</i> 2.6.20–22	<i>Genesis</i> 3.1.40–46
Scriptural phrase	“the Spirit of God hovered over the water”	“the Spirit of God hovered over the water”
Divine factor	The Spirit = a hatching bird	The Spirit = a living energy
Natural factor	The waters endowed with living power = hatched eggs	The waters endowed with living power = moving waters
Conjugated action	The Spirit warmed up and enlivened the waters	The Spirit moved and enlivened the waters

which “foments” or hatches the emerging cosmos to the auspicious temperature that allows it to develop, thrive, and itself become active. Once that critical temperature, or energetic intensity, is reached, the waters—that is, the primordial matter—begins to give birth to the various strands of reality—creation’s prodigious diversity. It is curious that John, who was closer to the Syriac culture which inspired Basil to use the metaphor of the nesting bird, did not use this image. Their respective interpretations nevertheless correspond: John’s energised waters are another way of depicting the interactive phenomenon signified by the hatched eggs of Basil’s image.

As Table 3 shows, in both cases the generative potential of nature cooperates with God’s power. Both models adhere therefore to the principle of synergy. There is nevertheless a slight asymmetry between them: while the Basilian image emphasises the divine input, John’s highlights the generative aptitude of nature. These variations do not break the bond between the two patristic models. They just bring to the fore the different sensitivities of their authors, largely conditioned by their preferred metaphors. The passage quoted above furthermore shows that John did more than just follow Basil’s train of thought. He read *Hexaemeron* with great attention, from which he borrowed the phrase “a living power of sorts” (ζωτικὴν τινὰ δύναμιν) verbatim. In so doing, he endorsed

Silvas, whose input I gratefully acknowledge, pointed out that Basil could have drawn from a parallel image in the Pentateuch, Deut 32:10–12. Basil gives much more attention to the organising activity of the Spirit in his last major work, *Spirit*. See Doru Costache, “Experiența Duhului Sfânt în Viziunea Sfinților Vasile cel Mare și Grigorie Palamas,” in *Sfântul Vasile cel Mare*, 145–161, esp. 146–153. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 198. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 100–101, 157, 163, 166. Marinescu, “Despre lumină,” 251–253. McConnell, *Illumination*, 71–73. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 169–170. It has been observed that his view of the Spirit largely draws on Origen’s. See Girardi, “Origene,” 1072–1081.

Basil's view that the principle of synergy operates on a cosmic scale. All these prove the impact of *Hexaemeron* upon later theologians, beginning with Basil's younger contemporaries.

In the light of their agreement, for Basil, as well as for John, nature is not separated from the supernatural which it includes and with which it cooperates. Nature, generally, and the natural laws in particular, are something richer than what modern culture and its reductionism usually recognise. Thus, neither of the two theologians makes allowance for either the naturalistic position of evolutionism or the supernaturalistic stance of creationism.

On this note, I must now turn to the matter of synergy as an ongoing phenomenon.

2.2 *Synergy throughout the Cosmic Continuum*

We have already seen that in *Hexaemeron* the events of the third, the fifth, and the sixth days, namely, the divine fertilisation of the earth and the waters, replicate the process begun with the primordial pregnancy of matter at God's utterance. My above analysis uncovered that the hatching bird over the nest of primordial waters represents a related motif. In what follows we shall discover that the same process unfolds under various guises throughout the cosmic continuum. And since the common denominator of all these scriptural images is the principle of synergy, this then is a mainstay of the process of creation. The consistency of these images and the message they share in common led Basil to conclude—as Alexei Nesteruk realised—that one can discern within the present circumstances how things occurred in the past.¹⁴³ This cosmological conviction coheres with the view of contemporary scientists who—given the universe's homogeneity and isotropic expansion—infer that our cosmic neighbourhood mirrors what happens both everywhere and as far back in time as immediately after the Big Bang.¹⁴⁴ What matters is that, understood in this way, Genesis does not depict only past events. Instead, it points to a universe ever in the making whose final term is the eschatological horizon, the mystical eighth day.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Nesteruk, *The Sense of the Universe*, 415–416.

¹⁴⁴ Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 115, 188. John D. Barrow, *The Origin of the Universe*, Science Masters (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 16–17. Hawking, *The Theory of Everything*, 19–27.

¹⁴⁵ Basil spoke more about the eighth day in *Spirit* 27.66.63–81. See Mario Baghos, “The Recapitulation of History and the “Eighth Day”: Aspects of St Basil the Great's Eschatological Vision,” in *Cappadocian Legacy*, 151–168. Other patristic representatives made recourse to the eschatological interpretation of Gen 1. See for instance Symeon the New Theologian,

Basil returns to this view in the fifth and the ninth homilies, where he presents creation as a continuous process.¹⁴⁶ Here is the first relevant passage:

And God said, “Let the earth produce green pasture, which engenders seed of its kind and fruit trees that make fruit of their sort, which have their seed within themselves”. So, when the earth rested after the weight of water was removed, the command (πρόσταγμα) made it engender (γένεονε βλαστήσαι) in an orderly fashion (ἀκολούθως), first herbs, then trees, as we still see things happening to this day (ὅπερ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ὁρώμεν γινόμενον). For that voice, or that first commandment, has become for nature a law of sorts (νόμος τις ἐγένετο φύσεως) which remained in the earth, giving it the power to give birth and produce fruit (τὴν τοῦ γεννᾶν καὶ καρποφορεῖν δύνανμιν) from then on (εἰς τὸ ἐξῆς).¹⁴⁷

And here is the second passage:

“Let the earth bring forth living soul—herds, wild animals, and reptiles.” Think of the word of God running through creation (ῥῆμα Θεοῦ διὰ τῆς κτίσεως τρέχον), still active now as it has been from the beginning (τότε ἀρξάμενον, καὶ μέχρι νῦν ἐνεργοῦν), and efficient until the end (εἰς τέλος) in order to bring the cosmos to fulfilment ... This commandment (πρόσταγμα) remains (active) in the earth and does not cease from being of utmost service (οὐ παύεται ἐξυπηρετουμένη) to the maker. Thus, whereas certain (animals) are introduced from the existing ones through succession (ἐκ τῆς διαδοχῆς), some are shown forth as engendered out of the very earth (ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς γῆς ζωογονούμενα) even now.¹⁴⁸

The phrase “the word of God running through creation” (ῥῆμα Θεοῦ διὰ τῆς κτίσεως τρέχον) in the second passage corresponds to Clement’s image of the back and forth movement of the Logos within the cosmos, discussed in Chap-

First Ethical Discourse 1 (for his discussion of the days of creation, including the eighth day, as ages, see esp. 1.116–133). See on this Costache, “Apologetic, Moral și Mystic,” 53–56.

146 The idea of an ongoing creation features, alongside the passages discussed in what follows, in *Hexaemeron* 1.6.8–10. Cf. Elena Ene D-Vasilescu, “How Would Gregory of Nyssa Have Understood Evolutionism?” *SP* 67:15 (2013), 151–169, esp. 152–153. The concept of continuous creation is not new. Even contemporary cosmology fiddles with it. See Davies, *The Mind of God*, 55–57.

147 *Hexaemeron* 5.1.1–10.

148 *Hexaemeron* 9.2.1–4, 18–22.

ter Two.¹⁴⁹ The divine commandment (πρόσταγμα) is an uninterrupted stream of energy permeating the spacetime continuum (οὐ παύεται ἐξυπηρετουμένη), contributing to the emergence of the universe, including the earthly ecosystem. This theological emphasis matches the passages, earlier analysed, which discuss creation's dependence on the creator.¹⁵⁰ But this excerpt brings to the fore a new aspect pertaining to the divine activity, namely, it is at work throughout the breadth and the length of the universe's history as was in the beginning (τότε ἀρξάμενον, καὶ μέχρι νῦν ἐνεργοῦν). God's work is not yet finished. What God did in the beginning, that God continues to do till the end. There is no discontinuity in the divine activity; nor is creation's chain of being broken by the emergence of new things out of nothing. Whether the new things come through succession (ἐκ τῆς διαδοχῆς) or are engendered by the earth (ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς γῆς ζωογονούμενα), their ontological solidarity remains.

The first passage confirms this view. The energising commandment of God—the very same divine power that worked towards the pregnancy of the primordial matter¹⁵¹—remains a permanent feature of the created world. Basil emphasises once again that no discontinuity exists within the creation and in the way the divine factor works. All the processes put into place operate smoothly, according to the canon of order (ἀκολούθως), then as in the beginning and ever (ὅπερ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ὁρώμεν γινόμενον). This is obvious in that the divine commandment or energy—corresponding to “the word of God running through creation” of the second excerpt—“has become for nature a law of sorts (νόμος τις ἐγένετο φύσεως) which remains in the earth.”¹⁵² It continues to operate in the background of and together with the laws of nature, synergistically, making the world fertile (γέγονε βλαστήσαι) and able to bear fruit (τὴν τοῦ γεννᾶν καὶ καρποφορεῖν δύναμιν).

In slightly different ways, these two passages therefore convey the inseparability of the divine power from the natural laws. As a result of their cooperation, the natural and the supernatural factors combine into an energy which radiates throughout the universe. In so doing, both passages confirm the complexity of Basil's concept of nature which harbours the permeating divine energy and which for that matter, we have found out already, is irreducible to modern naturalism. But the same combination of factors shows that Basil's concept of

149 Clement, *Exhortation* 1.5.2.

150 *Hexaemeron* 1.9.15–16, 26; 8.1.1–22.

151 *Hexaemeron* 2.3.38–42.

152 *Hexaemeron* 5.1.8–9. For a possible literary echo, see Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 202, where the original song which established Narnia continues to work in the air and in the ground, engendering more life.

nature offers no foothold to modern supernaturalism either. The divine factor does not impose on the cosmos by way of arbitrary outbursts, but operates within and through the natural laws. As a result, not everything is made instantaneously. The cosmos took and takes time to develop in an orderly fashion, as it still does (εἰς τὸ ἔξῃς), even until its eschatological term (εἰς τέλος).

All these account for the ongoing synergy at the heart of created reality. The two excerpts substantiate these nuances abundantly. What activates the earth's potential towards engendering the biosphere are the divine commandments, but the plants and the animals possess a natural fecundity which continues to cooperate with the supernatural factors involved.

As with Origen and Evagrius' approaches discussed in the previous two chapters, there is a hermeneutical significance therefore to these two passages and their parallels. They offer glimpses of Basil's consideration of the narrative of creation—within the scriptural canon in its entirety—as a key to decipher the processes unfolding in the cosmos, namely, their synergetic and ongoing dimensions. The principle of synergy—represented by the divine commandments and the creation's fecundity—reveals the complexity of the processes to which Genesis symbolically refers. Nature is open to the divine. The ongoing aspect of these processes, on which this section has focused, allows for a reading of the Genesis narrative in terms of mapping the pathway of the universe from chaos to order. Rev 21–22, earlier discussed with regards to Basil's take on the first words of Genesis, disclose the final term of this journey.¹⁵³ Thus, the primordial pregnant matter activated by divine commandment; the living waters over which the Spirit hovered; the earth of the third and the sixth days, which, prompted by commandments, engendered plant and animal life; the waters of the fifth day, which upon the divine command produced aquatic and aerial life; finally the plants and the animals endowed with the capacity to reproduce—all these led Basil to represent the creation as having its beginning in a reservoir of potentialities which was and is gradually actualised throughout the history of the cosmos, from beginning to end.

This representation stems from certain theological convictions, whose ramifications I now consider.

2.3 *Implications of the Principle of Synergy*

Basil's explication of the interactive and dynamic character of created reality opens up interesting vistas, inviting the reassessment of three related matters in relation to our own cultural landscape: the popular view of God and the

¹⁵³ *Hexameron* 1.3.16–20.

divine activity within the cosmos; the construct of nature in the modern era; and the contemporary clash of creationism and evolutionism.

Popular imagination pictures God as an omnipotent entity situated outside the creation, absolutely transcendent, wholly detached from the universe, life on earth, and humankind. This remote entity operates by way of arbitrary supernatural interventions *ex machina*, read miracles, understood as episodic outbursts which disrupt and/or abrogate the laws of nature. Earlier on I mentioned an outcome of this view, the notion of ontological discontinuity within the creation, particularly regarding the earthly biosphere. The complications which this model entails—from the idea of an arbitrary divine factor to a God with no regard for the environment—cannot be treated here. What matters is that there is no way of bridging this model, supposedly Christian and traditional, and contemporary science, where the unity of nature is axiomatic. By contrast, Basil believed that God's activity within the creation is continuous, not episodic, inherent to the universe's synergetic functioning, not something that overrides the laws of nature. We have seen above that an important outcome of this view is the conviction that what characterises nature is ontological continuity. The views of Denis Edwards on divine activity in the Athanasian thinking describe very well Basil's own position. For Edwards, God's energy is not an ostentatious manifestation of power. It is a humble—or kenotic—expression of a God who lovingly adapts to the nature's parameters.¹⁵⁴ The theology of creation cannot bypass this understanding without risking to perpetuate the complications of the *ex machina* model, especially its impact upon the current conversation between theologians and scientists.

But the model Basil proposes is by no means entirely favourable to contemporary science, especially when the latter exhibits an ideological presupposition such as naturalism. His explication of divine activity cooperatively involved with natural processes corresponds to an understanding of nature as multidimensional, complex, rich. His worldview therefore contrasts with the naturalist paradigm which dominates contemporary scientific culture, for which nature, or matter, is unidimensional. Since the dawn of modernity, indeed, matter has been seen as independent of God and devoid of any supernatural aspects. No scope is allowed for the "divine hypothesis" and, as such, naturalism reduces nature to an object of quantitative measurements. In the still very cartesian spirit of our age, nature, *res extensa*, belongs to an utterly

154 Edwards, *How God Acts*, xiii, 46, 58, 163. Denis Edwards, "Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion*: Resource for a Twenty-First Century Theology of God the Trinity," in *Alexandrian Legacy*, 72–92, esp. 77–81.

different dimension from the inner horizon of *res cogitans*. Accordingly, qualitative assessments are inapplicable to nature, which remains mute about the meaning and purpose of created existence. It is a truly impoverished worldview.¹⁵⁵ Basil's view of matter is far richer. Matter ontologically differs from the creator without being separated from its divine support; nature is never deprived of its supernatural ground. The natural laws make manifest the fundamental interaction of the cosmic and the uncreated factors at work within the universe. Matter emerges at this crossroads of forces and so—as Meyendorff aptly pointed out¹⁵⁶—must be examined through the complex lens of theology and science. In the same vein, Panayiotis Nellas clarified that theological anthropology looks at the mystical layer of human nature, while scientific anthropology considers the biological side.¹⁵⁷ In cosmological terms, while science describes physical objects and phenomena, theology explores creation's link with its creator. Whether the perspective is cosmological or anthropological, Basil's appraisal of nature, or matter, presupposes complexity and is thus irreducible to unidimensional representations.

Basil's perception of nature should not look strange and inadmissible any longer, regardless of the incapacity of scientific devices to measure the waves of divine energy that permeate the creation. There is, indeed, solid reason for optimism. Contemporary cosmologists theorise about fundamental ingredients of reality that are equally elusive, even making recourse to such apophatic concepts as “dark matter” and “dark energy” in order to designate the unquantifiable unknown. Consistency would demand that our scientific culture, which readily accepts such mysterious concepts, also be open to the notion of a divine energy that operates in the background of the universe.

But the ripples of divine presence are not as elusive as most people—particularly of a positivist cast of mind—believe them to be. Elsewhere, Basil discusses the transformation the saints experience in God's Spirit, including certain physiological changes.¹⁵⁸ These changes correspond to the divine or spiritual senses discussed in Chapters Three and Four. A reader of Basil's passages could not miss that for him the sanctified bodies of the saints are a supreme demonstration of God's activity in the universe. For my purposes here, I propose that, in this light, the measuring devices and the proofs we seek, albeit

155 I have addressed this type of worldview elsewhere. See my “Meaningful Cosmos,” 107–110, 128–130.

156 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 132–134.

157 Nellas, *Deification*, 41–42. See also Costache, “Theological Anthropology Today.”

158 Cf. *Spirit* 9.23.1–31. In Chapter Three we saw that Origen contemplated similar ideas. Cf. *Principles* 1.3.5.105–115; 1.3.6; 1.3.7.170–172; 1.3.8.210–212.

not manufactured, are the resplendent bodies of the saints. Given that their bodies are transformed—also given that their experience has been replicated by others like them—the Basilian view displays the unexpected hallmarks of a scientifically proven theory. What the known physical laws do not disclose about nature and God's activity in the universe is what the bodies of the saints make obvious. They confirm the richness of nature, or matter, thus transcending modern naturalist representations. Nature is more than quantity. It harbours the supernatural, being endowed with qualitative worth, meaning, and purpose. On this point, Basil's representation corresponds to Clement's understanding of nature, discussed in Chapter Two above,¹⁵⁹ and to the convictions of certain contemporary cosmologists who acknowledge the possibility of a meaningful or melioristic universe.¹⁶⁰

Basil's approach to nature leads, moreover, to a reconsideration of the culture war between creationists and evolutionists, including the premises of the antagonists. This conflict originates in two mutually exclusive representations of reality. The creationists adhere to the supernaturalist notion of a *deus ex machina* sporadically suspending the order of nature, whereas the evolutionists defend the naturalistic notion of a completely autonomous matter. We already know that Basil approaches reality very differently, by asserting that God is permanently at work within and through the natural possibilities of a universe that ultimately remains open to and dependent on its provident creator. His synergetic worldview spares one the effort of choosing between either of the two antagonist positions. From a Basilian vantage point therefore the warfare of creationism and evolutionism consists in but much ado about nothing. His position is consistent with the overall patristic view of things.¹⁶¹

We have discovered that Basil—by integrating theology and science in his worldview—proposed a concept of nature richer than its modern reductionist and naturalist counterpart. Against this backdrop, his universe is interactively dynamic, continuously emergent at the nexus of the divine and cosmic energies. Once again, this complex worldview offers important solutions for contemporary impasses. Also important for the economy of this chapter, indeed of this book, is that alongside his contributions to science and theology he managed to rephrase the Christian worldview into a mature cosmology.

Basil's synergetic view of nature is linked with his construct of the cosmos as a theological school. Given the fundamental interactivity of nature, for him

159 Clement, *Exhortation* 1.5.3,4. See Costache, "Meaningful Cosmos," 108–111, 117–121, 125–129.

160 Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 23, 615, 673–677. Davies, *The Mind of God*, 80, 231–222.

161 See Costache, "The Orthodox Doctrine of Creation," 50–54, 58–60.

the universe represents a theophany—or, more generally, a hierophany¹⁶² and “another scripture”—and so a place for theological learning. To this topic I must now turn.

3 The World as a Theological School

Lossky has shown that the Basilian representation of the divine energies as belonging to *oikonomia*, or God’s activity, affirms God’s accessibility to us.¹⁶³ Given the dynamic immanence of God in the creation, keen observers of the ordered universe are able to hone in on the divine. His remark coincides with my point on the connection between the principle of synergy, which presupposes the presence of God within the creation, and the notion of the cosmos as a theological school.

Basil considers the world “a school and a teaching ground (διδασκαλεῖον καὶ παιδευτήριον) for human souls,”¹⁶⁴ where divine instruction is supplied and where diligent students could acquire it. The cosmos is theologically meaningful, encapsulating the “untaught (ἀδίδακτος) law of nature”¹⁶⁵ mysteriously written within all things. This is another corollary of the anthropic principle, to which, together with the traditional predecessors discussed in Chapters One and Two, he subscribes. The view that the cosmos has a pedagogical dimension coheres with his variously formulated conviction that everything is created for humanity.¹⁶⁶ Being made for us, divinely ordered and supported, the universe does more than provide for our existence; it facilitates our theological instruction. The cosmos is a way in which God speaks to us, a means of divine revelation, and a framework of theological interpretation. At least Basil reads as much in the ordered world as he does in Scripture. And since he is able to interpret the cosmic book, he can teach others how to do the same. Accordingly, in *Hexaemeron* he equips his readers for the task of contemplating the world through the lens of the Genesis narrative of creation. George Kustas aptly noted

162 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 12. Hierophany, here, has a much broader sense than Eliade’s concept, for whom only certain places fit this category.

163 Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 82.

164 *Hexaemeron* 1.5.18–19.

165 *Hexaemeron* 9.3.76. “Untaught” (ἀδίδακτος) means not acquired by way of formal education. For comments on this matter, see Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 31. Bradshaw, “Plato in the Cappadocians,” 199–200, discussed the topic of the school with reference to Basil’s *Long Rules*. That the creator’s signature can be found everywhere in the natural laws is also Sagan’s unexpected conclusion in *Contact*, 371–372.

166 *Hexaemeron* 1.7.6–17; 4.1.19–37.

that “the *Hexaemeron* is not mere exegesis. It mirrors in unified image God’s word and God’s world.”¹⁶⁷ Echoes from the patristic antecedents discussed in Chapters Three and Four are discernible here. Either way, the homilies illustrate Basil’s sense of natural contemplation, which, we shall see further down, works well for believers.

Earlier scholars, such as Giet,¹⁶⁸ overlooked the topic of the world as a theological school, but this is not the case of more recent researchers. Blowers,¹⁶⁹ Bouteneff,¹⁷⁰ Peter Harrison,¹⁷¹ and Rousseau,¹⁷² have all mentioned the phrase “a school and a teaching ground” (διδασκαλεῖον καὶ παιδευτήριον), retaining its pedagogical and ethical significance. But, except for Blowers’ reference to it as integral to Cappadocian “contemplative cosmology,” these scholars have not addressed it from the viewpoint of its hermeneutical function. In turn, Köckert had the intuition that Basil’s two aims in *Hexaemeron*—to interpret Genesis and to contemplate the world—creatively converge in the cosmic school.¹⁷³ Taking my cue from her perception, what I propose is that the theological school of the cosmos is *the* theme—the pedagogical and hermeneutical centre of *Hexaemeron*—from the vantage of which Genesis deciphers the cosmos as “another scripture.”

The idea of the cosmic school underpins the entire discourse of the homilies. It accounts for what Blowers identified as specific to Basil’s approach, that is, a quest for the marks of divine wisdom and for the meaning of existence.¹⁷⁴ Seeking within the world the prints of the creator and the meaning of existence should not be construed as a lack of interest in the cosmos itself. Instead, this quest is Basil’s way of establishing cosmic meaningfulness. More than for his predecessors, the world is, *pace* Stephen Hildebrand,¹⁷⁵ Basil’s topic. His recourse to Scripture reveals the theological significance of the creation;

167 Kustas, “Saint Basil,” 247.

168 Giet, “Introduction,” 70–73. Similarly, Louth (“Basil and the Fathers,” 77–78) mentioned neither the cosmic school nor humankind’s calling to contemplate the universe theologically.

169 Paul Blowers, “Beauty, Tragedy and New Creation: Theology and Contemplation in Cappadocian Cosmology,” *IJST* 18:1 (2016): 7–29, esp. 15.

170 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 133, 136.

171 Harrison, *Territories*, 62–63.

172 Rousseau, *Basil*, 334.

173 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 316–318.

174 Blowers, “Beauty,” 20. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea*, 256. Here, Basil once again rehearses Theophilus’ approach. See Louth, “The Six Days,” 43–44.

175 “The goal of Basil’s work was to explain biblical revelation, not the natural world” (Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 13).

it does not replace the “other scripture” of the cosmos. Scripture and the cosmic school complement each other.

Before I discuss the world as a theological school, I must clarify the nature of his pedagogical—or rather “mystagogical”—approach to Genesis. This clarification is necessary given that Genesis is the lens through which he considers the universe.

3.1 *Reading the Narrative of Creation*

That Basil is an educator is obvious not only in explicitly pedagogical pieces such as *Address*, but also in his natural contemplations and, immediately relevant here, scriptural interpretations. *Hexaemeron* itself is a didactic exposé.¹⁷⁶ In it, he typically construes the narratives of creation and paradise in Genesis as pedagogical parables, wisdom lessons, or exhortatory teachings.¹⁷⁷ As we read in a work attributed to him, “the story of human fashioning is a lesson (παίδευσις) for our life.”¹⁷⁸ The narrative, *historia*, and the message, *theologia*, run parallel.¹⁷⁹ To his eyes, furthermore, in its scriptural rendering human morphology itself becomes a pedagogical lesson.

The importance of this statement for the sapiential message of Genesis could be challenged on the grounds of doubtful authorship; scholars have not come to agree on the authenticity of this work.¹⁸⁰ It exudes nevertheless a distinctly Basilian scent. The following example confirms its affinity with Basil's views. In an authentic comment on Gen 1:24,¹⁸¹ he contrasts the human being and the quadrupeds on symbolic grounds. On that occasion he asserts that God had designed the human body according to pedagogical criteria. Specif-

176 Puech, *Histoire de la littérature*, 259.

177 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 135. Brown, *The Days of Creation*, 31. Puech, *Histoire de la littérature*, 258.

178 *On the Origin of Humanity* 1.21 (PG 30, 33A).

179 For the construct of *historia* (narrative) and *theologia* (salvific or spiritual teaching) in Basil, see Rousseau, “Human Nature,” 225–226, 232. For the meaning of *historia* or to *historikon* in Basil and other early Christian authors, see Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 107–109. Without reference to Basil, on *historia* in patristic literature see also the notes of Frances Young, “Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis,” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1:334–354, esp. 341–347.

180 Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:217. Puech, *Histoire de la littérature*, 257 n. 5. For a little more than a sentence concerning the authenticity of the homilies *On the Origin of Humanity*, see Nonna Verna Harrison, “Introduction,” in *On the Human Condition*, 11–29, esp. 14–15. Rousseau, *Basil*, 318, mentioned the “eleven great sermons on the creation of the world,” namely, *Hexaemeron*, tacitly adding the two supposedly spurious homilies to the nine authentic ones. See also idem, “Human Nature,” 222.

181 *Hexaemeron* 9.2, 31–47.

ically, the uprightness of the human body—befitting the dignity of the rational soul—denotes our capacity and call to look heavenwards, whereas the quadrupeds, as a rule, look earthwards. Mirroring the Genesis narrative of creation itself, human morphology represents an invitation to seek God and to attain a noble way of life, even the “heavenly citizenship.” While the latter echoes a central topic of *Diognetus*, analysed in Chapter One, here, the eschatological intensity of the Disciple’s discourse is diminished by a sense of belonging with the creation in its entirety. Be that as it may, the human body represents a wisdom lesson and a theological parable.

The two texts—both the possibly spurious and the undoubtedly authentic—therefore convey the same message. Genesis inspires an interpretive approach to human morphology which leads to its understanding as a meaningful reality. This conclusion overlaps with Basil’s view of the cosmos as a theological school and as “another scripture”—affirming, as Ayres states, “creation’s semiotic structure.”¹⁸² We hear a distinct echo of Athanasius’ cosmological syntax here. This assumption concerning creation’s theological meaningfulness will guide my following analysis of relevant passages from *Hexaemeron*, especially from its prologue.

I preface my analysis by once again affirming Basil’s debt to the Alexandrian theologians. To Athanasius, already mentioned a few times as a source, I will return a little later. Basil learnt from Clement about the usefulness of adopting Genesis as a vantage point for natural contemplation, specifically, for representing the cosmos as creation.¹⁸³ In his analysis, Blowers did not connect them explicitly, but he pointed out that both made use of the scriptural narrative for the same purposes.¹⁸⁴ We shall soon discover that Basil deploys Genesis as a lens through which he sees the cosmos as an open book which speaks about the creator’s relationship with the creation. He also borrows from Origen, who articulated “physics” in the framework of scriptural interpretation.¹⁸⁵ Origen’s bridging Genesis and spiritual anthropology, in *Homily*, must have inspired his view of anthropological symbolism, earlier mentioned. Origen also conceived of the cosmos as a school for souls,¹⁸⁶ a representation which impacted him

182 Ayres, *Nicaea*, 315, 317.

183 Cf. *Stromateis* 1.1.15.2; 4.1.2.1–2; 4.1.3.2. See Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 149. For Basil’s corresponding approach, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 320–321.

184 Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 148–149. Blowers, “Beauty,” 13.

185 Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 148–149. Much later, Maximus (*Difficulty* 10.17.30) added in the same vein that what makes possible the correspondence of scriptural and natural contemplation is that the divine principles of Scripture and creation coincide.

186 Johnson, “Constructing a Narrative Universe,” 175–179. Scott, *Journey Back to God*, 74, 93, 100, 161, 165.

profoundly. Indeed, Basil depicts the world as a special place where humankind can learn about its creator and its divine destination.¹⁸⁷ Between Origen and Basil's methods there is a range of continuities and discontinuities that I cannot address here.¹⁸⁸ What matters is that—setting aside Origen's different interests in regard to the creation narrative—without a doubt Basil learnt from him to approach both Genesis and the world spiritually. Moreover, in Clement and Origen's footsteps Basil ascribes methodological significance to the “holy gnostic,” the saintly sage, in this case Moses.

In the prologue to *Hexaemeron*, for example, he mirrors the Alexandrian spiritual perspective without indicating his sources. But let us examine the text, which outlines the way believers should read the first verse of Genesis.

What hearing is worthy (ἄξια) of the magnitude of what is being said? How much should the soul be prepared (παρεσκευασμένην) to engage such a lecture? (The soul should be) purified (καθαρεύουσιν) from the passions of the flesh, not clouded (ἀνεπισκότητον) by the pursuits of everyday life. (It should also be) industrious, inquisitive, and ever watchful (φιλόπονον, ἐξεταστικὴν, πάντοθεν περισκοπούσαν), so that from anywhere it can gather a worthy notion of God (ἄξιαν ἔννοιαν τοῦ Θεοῦ). However, before examining (πρὶν ἐξετάσαι) the exactness of these (scriptural) words and assessing (διερευνήσασθαι) what is signified by these diminutive phrases, let us consider who (τίς) speaks to us. And even though our weak understanding prevents us from matching the profound heart of the writer, being mindful of the speaker's trustworthiness we shall be willingly persuaded to assent with what Moses, who jotted down this writing, had said.¹⁸⁹

After rhetorical interrogations meant to draw attention to the seriousness of the undertaking,¹⁹⁰ the prologue highlights a series of methodological requirements, objective and subjective in nature.

187 *Hexaemeron* 3.10.27–36. See Blowers, “Beauty,” 12. Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 136.

188 Scholars have long discussed Basil's hermeneutical affiliation to Origen's method. Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz, “Basil of Caesarea,” 461. Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 121, 124–131. Gunton, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 58. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 140. Kannengiesser, *Handbook*, 740. Lim, “Politics,” 357–358, 360–361. Louth, *Origins*, 2–6, 60–61. McGuckin, “Patterns,” 44–45. Rousseau, *Basil*, 320. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 206–207. The ingenious Basilian reiteration of Origen's hermeneutical method within the framework of mainstream fourth-century Orthodoxy inaugurated a process of critical yet positive reception that culminated with Maximus. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 24–25.

189 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.6–18. *Hexaemeron* 2.1.1–17 evidences a similar position.

190 On Basil's rhetorical approach in *Hexaemeron*, see Louth, “Basil and the Fathers,” 72–73.

In terms of objective requirements, the passage refers to diligence in study (see φιλόπονον, ἐξεταστικὴν, πάντοθεν περισκοποῦσαν; ἐξετάσαι; διερευνήσασθαι) and the need to discern the theological messages encoded all around us. Basil generalises here, it seems, his conviction that throughout Scripture *theologia* runs in tandem with *historia*, testing one's skills in multilayered interpretation. Diligence in study therefore would refer to the proper way of handling *historia* or the narrative, whereas discernment would serve to determine its theological significance. As with Scripture, so with the world. This double hermeneutics matches the Basilian approach to the cosmos by way of scientific analysis and theological interpretation. That said, the passage does not mention the examination of the world, at least not explicitly, but focuses instead on Scripture's theological message. It is the latter—denoted by the phrase “a worthy notion of God” (ἄξιαν ἔννοιαν τοῦ Θεοῦ)¹⁹¹—that above all requires laboriousness, inquisitiveness, and watchfulness.

Regarding the subjective, or affective, requirements of the method, the passage exhorts the reader of Genesis to undertake ascetic purification and ultimately personal transformation (ἄξια; παρεσκευασμένην; καθαρεύουσιν; ἀνεπισκότητον).¹⁹² This is because only a purified mind has access to the *sensus plenior* or the superior teaching—“the magnitude of what is being said”—which hides behind the simple wording—“diminutive phrases”—of the scriptural narrative. As the unsophisticated phraseology of the text can mislead the inattentive, so the superior teaching eludes the grasp of the impure. Deep comprehension requires therefore—in medieval parlance, *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*—the adjustment of the mind to the object of its analysis. It is this adjustment, existential in nature, that requires ascetic purification. Hildebrand has noted aptly that, by demanding existential compatibility between the interpreter and the *sensus plenior*, the prologue sets a very high hermeneutical standard.¹⁹³ Attaining the requisite compatibility is not a matter of technique. Compatibility with the higher scriptural sense presupposes personal catharsis and transformation. But, emulating the ascetic protocols of his Alexandrian predecessors, Basil seems to suggest that access to the higher sense is granted only to whoever measures up to Moses, the channel of divine communication. The

191 While the words differ, Basil echoes here Athanasius' statement about paradisiacal Adam maintaining God's accurate representation (*Gentiles* 2.11–12).

192 Cf. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 318–319. His brother, Gregory of Nyssa picked up on catharsis as a necessary condition for research and contemplation in *On Virginity* 11.3.1–14.

193 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 111. See also Alieva, “Moses in the Wilderness,” 138–140 and Sarisky, “Who Can Listen,” 13–23.

subjective dimension therefore entails more than the reader's compatibility with the divine words behind the narrative's human words; it entails assimilation with the saintly writer. Seen in this light, interpretation is a participatory event.

Rousseau alluded to this participatory dimension in *Hexaemeron* when he highlighted other elements of what he called the hermeneutical bridge uniting the Spirit, Moses, the narrative, and the interpreter.¹⁹⁴ Interpretation is an event of correspondence between and interaction of all these poles of the hermeneutical experience. This conclusion stands even though the prologue does not mention all the factors included in Rousseau's list. What it does, alongside referring to ascetic purification, is show that interpretation is not a solitary journey. The interpreter must connect with Moses—an authenticated witness of divine revelation—and have faith in his guidance. In Basil's words, he or she must "assent with what Moses had said." Mere research, without purification and spiritual guidance, is insufficient for grasping the truth. Here echoes reverberate from Clement, Origen, and Athanasius, whose contributions Basil valued. In turn, Evagrius, his onetime disciple, appears to have borrowed from him the distinction between human and divine gnosis, together with the view that the two kinds of information need different treatment.¹⁹⁵ As it discriminates between the objective and the subjective requirements, the above passage illustrates the same view.

The prologue does not connect the objective and the subjective sides of the method in any explicit ways. However, if the structure of the text is not fortuitous—particularly the sentence which refers to the interpreter's soul as "purified from the passions of the flesh, not clouded by the pursuits of everyday life, laborious, inquisitive, always watchful in order to gather from anywhere a worthy notion of God"—then the method suggests the advancement from purification to research to theology. Basil's method therefore entails the ascetic prerequisite of purification that sharpens the discernment required by research, together enabling one's grasp of the narrative's theological message. His method, obviously, iterates the threefold curricula of the Alexandrian theologians. In short, his approach constitutes a sophisticated way of reading the

194 Rousseau, "Human Nature," 226. Recent scholars show a great interest in scriptural interpretation as a participatory experience. See for example Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017). Basil's *Homilies on the Psalms* receive here some attention (at 143–145), while *Hexaemeron* is mentioned only regarding whether or not it illustrates the principles of allegorical interpretation (at 31–32).

195 *Gnostic* 45.2.

narrative of creation within an objective framework which also accommodates personal convictions and virtue.¹⁹⁶ Later on we shall discover that he used the same method for natural contemplation.

Given the prominent role reserved for the personally transformative dimension of this method—perfectly illustrated in Basil's portrait of Moses—we ought consider it more closely. Indeed, this dimension is equally central to reading Genesis and contemplating the cosmos.

3.2 *Spiritual Guidance and Transformative Experience*

I begin by noting the discrepancy between the spiritualising prologue, which praises the profound wisdom of Moses and demands purification, and the primarily descriptive and polemical content of the homilies. The difference is obvious and one might rightly wonder what were Basil's reasons for beginning on such a high note.

True, the prologue does not promise—as one might expect after the hermeneutical caveats discussed above—either a spiritual interpretation of Genesis or a mystical contemplation of the cosmos. But the analytical approach to both narrative and the world in *Hexaemeron* nevertheless constitutes an anticlimax to the prologue. As we have seen in the first half of this chapter, the homilies focus on the difficulties entailed by the interactions of Christians with foreign trends and ideas, Genesis being presented as a source of practical wisdom and an instrument of cultural discernment. It also provides tremendous insights into the nature of creation and the workings of the natural laws in combination with the divine energies. However, the loftier parts of the homilies display no more than doxological expressions of awe at the creation's wise design, together with ethical considerations and advices. There is nothing mystical and contemplative about those parts.¹⁹⁷ The doxological and the ethical aspects of the discourse are not without relevance for believers of course. Both denote the pedagogical and formative scope of *Hexaemeron*, also being consistent with the central topic of the cosmic school. That said, drawing doxological and ethical conclusions would not warrant the precautions taken in the prologue.

196 See on this, briefly, Costache, "Christian Gnosis," 262.

197 Aptly, Hildebrand (*Trinitarian Theology*, 110–111) pointed out the absence of lofty contemplations in *Hexaemeron*. But while he discussed the ethical dimension of Basilian thinking (at 117–121), he left *Hexaemeron* out. For comments on Basil's ethical positions in the tenth and the eleventh homilies, see Rousseau, "Human Nature," 223. His ethical conclusions correspond to Origen's second "higher sense" of scriptural narratives. See Elizabeth A. Dively Lauro, "Reconsidering Origen's Two Higher Senses of Scriptural Meaning: Identifying the Psychic and Pneumatic Senses," *SP* 34 (2001): 306–317, esp. 345–346.

This incongruity between the prologue and the homilies, generally ignored by recent scholars, does not seem to be unintentional. In patristic fashion, Basil does not advertise his reasons for proceeding in such a way, but they can be discerned from a number of elements and hints within the writing. Here are the main facts. First, the prologue and related texts—such as *Hexaemeron* 2.1, earlier mentioned—demand from the reader both interpretive skill and spiritual achievements. Second, spiritual achievements such as purification normally condition the attainment of higher contemplations. Third, nothing like lofty contemplations can be found in the homilies, which generally tackle the text analytically and prioritise scientific information in matters of nature. Fourth, the ninth homily includes a tirade against allegory¹⁹⁸ as though to account for the absence of higher contemplations. With or without Basil's refusal of futile allegories, the contrast between the spiritual prerequisites and the analytical content of the homilies is undeniable. Why would spiritual preparation be needed—indeed the reader's matching the virtue of Moses—if reading Genesis were primarily a matter of analytical skill, grammatical acuity, and scientific awareness?

One answer emerges if we consider these facts through the lens of Basil's pastoral protocols and intentions. As Gregory of Nyssa pointed out, the initial listeners of the homilies were at best of average education.¹⁹⁹ We saw above that the listeners, whatever their cultural level, were interested in exotic theories, like Manichaeism, and practices, like astrology. Basil must have tempered his discourse to motivate his hearers to stay the course by enhancing their devotion and discouraging hazardous interpretations. Spiritual interpretations and lofty contemplations proved less effective. It seems strange that although the homilies were later elegantly polished for publication, this strategy did not

198 *Hexaemeron* 9.1.11–22. As I read this passage, Basil does not take an in principle stand against allegory; he seems to be envisaging gratuitous allegorisations. His ethical inferences from animal and plant behaviours clearly resonate with Origen's spiritual reading of Genesis in *Homily*, as discussed in Chapter Three. On Basil's complex attitude towards allegory, see Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 133–139; Louth, "Basil and the Fathers," 74–75; Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 125.

199 *Apology* 4.9.16–11.2. A number of scholars confirmed his view. Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 130. Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 139–141. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 313. Jaclyn Maxwell, "The Attitudes of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus toward Uneducated Christians," *SP* 47 (2010): 117–122. In turn, Anthony Meredith maintained the view that Basil's listeners were rather educated, even though he admitted that the homilist himself mentioned the presence of simple people in the congregation. See Anthony Meredith, "The Three Cappadocians on Beneficence: A Key to Their Audiences," in *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Pauline Allen, ANHS 1 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998), 89–104, esp. 92, 103.

change. He must have considered the same pastoral challenges too important to ignore for the sake of producing a more exciting reading of the narrative, even though—unlike the listeners—his first readers were educated.

There is yet another way of considering the situation, not unrelated to the previous. It seems to me that the outlined strategy adheres to the *disciplina arcana*,²⁰⁰ denoting mystagogical acumen. As Richard Lim pointed out, Basil, by refraining from incursions into contemplative horizons, conceals the mystical dimensions of the teaching, of which he was well aware.²⁰¹ He raises a barrier against indiscretion.²⁰² It is not only awareness of the average education of his listeners—and possibly readers—that determines him to avoid the contemplative approach. It is also, perhaps first of all, his conviction that the spiritually immature are unsuited to contemplation and inapt recipients of mystical teachings. The prologue expresses this conviction. His question “How much should the soul be prepared to engage such a lecture?”²⁰³ cannot be taken as a merely rhetorical device. This question is a subtle way of warning that mystical discourse is unwarranted in the presence of the very young in spiritual matters. His onetime friend, Gregory, expresses similar views.²⁰⁴

That said, there is no sign in *Hexaemeron* that Basil quite construed himself as a gatekeeper of the mysteries, wielding a fiery sword to warn off the unenlightened. As a pedagogue or rather mystagogue, he had a vested interest in fostering the spiritual progress of his disciples. This required their solid anchoring in the finer points of Christian teaching. For this reason he shared with his audiences the ascetic provisos of any advancements along that path. As a spiritual leader, moreover, and one trained in the classical *paideia* at that, he knew that cheap wisdom was no wisdom at all. Echoes from Clement and Origen reverberate here with utmost clarity. Spiritual maturity could not be reached without appropriate guidance and personal toil. Since his audiences were not on that level, he could not publicly deliver a discourse intended for the spiritually mature. It goes the same for readers—if not more so—since Basil

200 See Juliette Day, “Adherence to the *Disciplina Arcana* in the Fourth Century,” *SP* 35 (2001): 266–270, esp. 269, for Basil’s use of the discipline of secrecy elsewhere. Overall, recent researchers of *Hexaemeron* ignore his adherence to the *disciplina*, perhaps because of his supposed commitment to the literal interpretation. Against the tide, Lim (“Politics,” 364) identifies this traditional strategy in *Hexaemeron*.

201 *Spirit* 27.66.15–95.

202 Lim, “Politics,” 352, 362–363. Cf. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 314–315 and Sarisky, “Who Can Listen,” 18.

203 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.6–8.

204 Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 27.3.1–7; *Oration* 28.2–3. See Costache, “Christian gnosis,” 263.

could not control who these might be. I am certain that the way Origen's writings have been posthumously received did not encourage him at all. But this is not the same thing as refusing to teach people. His silence regarding contemplative avenues is strategic. It is a way of stirring interest in research and in personal advancement. Thus, while he does not offer direct answers, he outlines a method which empowers his audiences to search for them. The search is what prompts their progress. That this is his intention transpires through the reference, above, to the need of being "industrious, inquisitive, always watchful in order to gather from anywhere a worthy notion of God."²⁰⁵

Perhaps this is not a literal adherence to the *disciplina arcani*. But it is definitely a heuristic approach by which—as Hildebrand pointed out—Basil incites his audiences to undertake the necessary steps towards contemplating the cosmos and the scriptural narrative of creation.²⁰⁶ This strategy is consistent with his interpretive protocols with reference to his words, "the story left them (sc. the fundamental elements) out so that our mind can exercise its skills by inferring the rest from little pointers."²⁰⁷ We have seen above what he means here. In this light, his homilies are a tool to work with and not a final answer to the conundrums of Genesis. Basil makes this clear towards the end of the third homily. Here is the text.

Let our discourses on the second day end here, so that the diligent listeners (φιλοπόνους ἀκροαταῖς) are given an opportunity to assess (καιρὸν ἐξετάσεως) what they have heard. And if there is anything useful in these (explanations,) let them memorise them so that by way of laborious exercise (διὰ τῆς φιλοπόνου μελέτης), as though through digestion, they may expect the assimilation of what is profitable.²⁰⁸

The depth and intensity of the teaching demands a response from his diligent audiences (φιλοπόνους ἀκροαταῖς). The teacher does not provide ready-made solutions; hence listeners and readers alike have to grapple with the implications of the teaching, intellectually and spiritually. Understanding is directly proportional to the degree to which they assimilate or absorb profitable implications, incorporating them into their own lives through industrious philosophical exercise (διὰ τῆς φιλοπόνου μελέτης), "as though through digestion." Basil's tantalising discretion regarding contemplative insights means to stir

²⁰⁵ *Hexaemeron* 1.1.9–11.

²⁰⁶ Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology*, 112.

²⁰⁷ *Hexaemeron* 2.3.17–19.

²⁰⁸ *Hexaemeron* 3.10.18–23.

their efforts to attain higher truths. These philosophical efforts, in turn, catalyse the personal progress of the diligent. The praxis of spiritual guidance—or pastorally applied mystagogy—is obvious here. So is, too, the Socratic approach of a master of the heuristic method. Gregory of Nyssa points to this aspect of Basil's strategy in an enigmatic reference to the "true purpose pertaining to the teaching of our father."²⁰⁹ Taking his cue from that very strategy, Gregory himself abstained from disclosing what that purpose was.

These findings help us correctly elucidate the tension between the spiritualising prologue and the discourse of *Hexaemeron*, which is not an inconsistency. The complex method outlined in the prologue, entailing analytical skills and ascetic purification, has to be appropriated on a personal level to then be applied to Genesis, to the cosmos, and to the insights of the preacher. In tune with Clement's *Teacher* and Origen's *Principles*, the homilies crack open the heuristic door of contemplative interpretation without depriving the audiences of the opportunity to earn wisdom through personal effort—an effort which, irreducible to ratiocinative endeavours, requires one's transformation.

In the light of the above, the sketch of Moses' transformative journey within the prologue²¹⁰ is an exemplary story, representing an implicit invitation addressed to the audiences to emulate that very experience. This sketch, evocative of Clement and Origen's pathway to holiness, presents the prophet's three-fold progress from ascetic detachment to natural contemplation to the mystical vision of the divine. According to Basil, indeed, the prophet spent forty years in the "contemplation of (created) existents" (θεωρία τῶν ὄντων) in the eremitic remoteness of his exile. The journey culminated with his "becoming equal to the angels in that he was worthy to gaze directly upon God."²¹¹ Moses' story had a particular appeal for Basil, who undertook a less prolonged yet no less eremitic experience in the retreat of his family.²¹²

The outline of Basil's method—involving purification, research, and theology—replicates the stages of spiritual progress in the Alexandrian curricula. In rewriting the story of the prophet, Basil seemingly conveyed that the same

209 *Apology* 4.9.16–17.

210 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.18–42.

211 Οὗτος τοίνυν ὁ τῆς αὐτοπροσώπου θεάς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐξίσου τοῖς ἀγγέλοις ἀξιωθεῖς (*Hexaemeron* 1.1.40–41).

212 Basil designated his family's retreat in Pontus as liminal—ἐσχατιά—and so outside everyday life, eremitic. See Carmelo Crimi, "Da una frontiera all'altra: *eschatia* nei Padri cappadoci," in *Studi bizantini in onore di Maria Dora Spadaro*, ed. Tiziana Creazzo et al. Orpheus 2 (Catania: Bonanno Editore, 2016), 145–161, esp. 151–154, 157–158. On the Pontian retreat of Basil's family and its impact on his thinking, see Silvas, *The Asketikon*, 20–22, 64–82, 86–89.

experience can be replicated, that he emulated it personally, and that it can be pursued by his audiences. This is to say that only by mirroring the transformative journey of Moses could they gain access to Scripture, nature, and God, as he, Basil, did. This point corresponds to what we discovered earlier regarding the hermeneutical principle of existential compatibility between the reader, the writer, and the message. It also resonates with his manner of spiritual guidance by enticing the audiences to undertake the prescribed steps towards personal transformation and towards grasping wisdom. In his footsteps, Gregory of Nyssa further detailed the mechanics of this process by way of a sustained contemplation of Moses' journey.²¹³

On this note, I must turn to the hermeneutical significance of Moses for the Basilian construct of the cosmos as “another scripture” and as a theological school.

3.3 *The Cosmic School*

Within the prologue, Moses' personal trajectory appears to function not only as an inspirational example of spiritual progress and transformation, but also as a hermeneutical key to unlocking the inner meaning of the cosmic narrative.

What must have prompted Basil, indeed, to refer to the world as a school was, together with the tradition of spiritual exegesis of Genesis as a starting point for natural contemplation, earlier discussed, the experience of Moses in the wilderness. In his words, the prophet “devoted forty full years for the contemplation of beings (τῇ θεωρίᾳ τῶν ὄντων). Only when he was eighty years of age did he see God, as much as a human being can see (εἶδε Θεόν, ὡς ἀνθρώπῳ ἰδεῖν δυνατόν).”²¹⁴ Two of the three stages of the spiritual journey feature here, namely, the contemplation of nature and the divine vision. Of immediate interest is the former of these. In addition to saying something fundamental about the prophet and his insight into the mystery of the cosmos, the passage implies that the world is an object to ponder and of wonderment—and more, a beautiful place of theological learning and a means of acquiring divine knowledge. The beauty of the world has theological depth, demanding a theological way of looking at it, perhaps a theological aesthetic. This stance echoes Clement's reaction to the “beautiful things” in nature.²¹⁵ The world is never coarse matter. Nor is it reducible to quantitative appraisals. To paraphrase Bradbury again, while science investigates “a miracle we can never explain,” Basil's theological

213 Blowers, “Mystics and Mountains,” 10, 12.

214 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.32–34. For the culminating phase of this trajectory, cf. *Hexaemeron* 1.1.40–41, quoted above.

215 *Stromateis* 5.11.73.2–3. I analysed this passage in Chapter Three, above.

insight and artistic sensibility do not “crush the aesthetic and the beautiful” in the world, instead supplying “an interpretation of that miracle.”²¹⁶ In tune with the principle of synergy, matter is a diaphanous milieu where the purified eye discovers the marks of its creator. Thus, seeing God is possible not only directly, by way of mystical vision, but also indirectly, through “contemplating the beings” (τῇ θεωρίᾳ τῶν ὄντων). The effort to comprehend the cosmos eventually leads to the divine vision (εἶδε Θεόν, ὡς ἀνθρώπῳ ἰδεῖν δυνατόν). The more the prophet discerns creation’s mystery, the closer he gets to its creator. This conclusion coheres with the overall Basilian take on the universe as theologically meaningful.

We have seen above, in Chapters Two and Three, that, following Philo, several early Christian authors referred to the contemplative experiences of Moses in the desert, experiences which led him to a profound understanding of the world. The prophet’s insights had been then recorded—it was supposed—in the Genesis narrative of creation, becoming an authenticated lens for peering at the universe. Basil summarises the contributions of these traditional confrères in *Hexaemeron*’s prologue. What matters here is that Moses’ story and its literary legacy induce him to adopt the narrative of creation as a hermeneutical key. He adopts Genesis as a criterion for discerning cosmic mysteries on the grounds that it records Moses’ insightfulness. It is the wisdom of a spiritually advanced person who spent forty years in the contemplation of nature.²¹⁷ Through this lens, the universe is a manifestation of divine wisdom and a place of learning, “a school and a teaching ground for human souls.”²¹⁸

Rendering the cosmos a theological school are its order, beauty, and meaningfulness, which point to the creator and reveal the purpose of created existence. The world is an artwork, indeed, the aesthetic of which is part of God’s pedagogical intent.²¹⁹ This perception coheres with Basil’s cosmological optimism, transparent in his opposition to Manichaeism and other representations of reality. In Chapter Three we found out that Origen already construed the cosmos as a school. Basil unquestionably took his cue from him. But he did not see the world as a transitory place of learning through suffering and misery. For him, the cosmos is a means of divine revelation where much can be learnt about God and the meaning of life. True, Origen’s own appraisal of the world was pedagogically grounded, but Basil cleared the topic of its initial dramatic overtones.

²¹⁶ Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 88.

²¹⁷ *Hexaemeron* 1.1.6–18, 32–33.

²¹⁸ *Hexaemeron* 1.5.18–19.

²¹⁹ *Hexaemeron* 1.7.6–17.

What facilitated his reinterpretation of the school motif may have been Athanasius' filtration of earlier theological inputs. We know that, following Antony and his desert company, Athanasius perceived the universe as musical harmony and as a divine syntax.²²⁰ Syntactically coherent, created beings convey a theological message written in the cosmic tome. As a result, and as we discovered in Chapter Four, once purified and properly trained one is able "to gain knowledge about God from visible things ... as though through letters."²²¹ The cosmos is an implicit scripture, a narrational space.²²² This "inscribed" cosmos plays an analogous role to Basil's school. *Hexaemeron* actually commences on a similar note, iterating the possibility of acquiring the divine knowledge through exploring reality's visible side.²²³ Athanasius and Basil also share the habit of peering at the world through a wider scriptural lens than of the Genesis narrative alone. For example, Basil refers to the theologically meaningful cosmos of Ps 18:1–4 (LXX)²²⁴ and the revelatory world of Rom 1:19–20,²²⁵ as does Athanasius too.²²⁶ With or without an Athanasian influence, Basil, as Milton Anastos has shown, believes that all things created announce God.²²⁷ The cosmos bears the creator's imprint and therefore is theologically meaningful. This perception is the source of his reference to the "untaught law of nature,"²²⁸ earlier mentioned. Created nature is for him, after all, as Kustas pointed out, *logos*,²²⁹ discourse, or narrative.

But just as Athanasius' cosmic book needs trained readers, Basil's cosmic school requires an appropriate tutor and eager students. Timothy McConnell noted Basil's view—in *Spirit*—that the universe's meaningful layout is disclosed by the Holy Spirit only to gifted, dispassionate, and virtuous seekers.²³⁰

220 *Gentiles* 38.1–7, 35–47; *Life* 78.1. Cf. Evagrius, *Monk* 92.

221 *Gentiles* 34.29–31.

222 The phrase "implicit scripture" is inspired by Dumitru Stăniloae's thoughts about Scripture and nature. See his *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, third edn (București: EIBMBOR, 2003), 1:26, 31.

223 ἀρχὴν τῆς τῶν ὁραμένων διακοσμήσεως ("the origin of the orderly arrangement of things visible"; *Hexaemeron* 1.1.2). For Basil's alignment to the patristic tradition of assessing the creation as theophany, see Blowers, *Drama*, 327.

224 *Hexaemeron* 3.9.23–25.

225 *Hexaemeron* 1.6.16–18.

226 Athanasius refers to Ps 18 in *Gentiles* 27.27–28 and to Rom 1 in *Gentiles* 35.20–21. He must have followed Clement and Origen, who, we discovered in Chapter Three, drew on both Genesis and the Psalms.

227 Anastos, "Basil's Κατὰ Εὐνομίον," 117.

228 *Hexaemeron* 9.3.76.

229 Kustas, "Saint Basil," 241–242.

230 McConnell, *Illumination*, 71.

McConnell's assessment corresponds to what Rousseau found in *Hexaemeron*, namely, that to understand the world one needs the Spirit's guidance, Moses' teaching, the authenticated narrative of Genesis, and a purified life.²³¹ The Spirit and Moses are the pedagogues in charge of the cosmic schoolroom. The students, called to virtue and diligent study, learn under guidance to read the universe both directly and—indirectly—in the scriptural testimony, or in the mirror of Scripture. The school therefore works like Basil's hermeneutics of existential compatibility and the principle of synergy, requiring worthiness and interactivity. Let me explain.

Basil shared with his traditional predecessors the view that the cosmos is mysterious and that many of its meaningful layers are not readily accessible. The intelligible side of things is by nature elusive. In order to grasp it, students have to be equipped appropriately, namely, to deploy the scriptural lens and the hermeneutical prerequisites discussed above. These prerequisites are, again, personal purification, dispassion, industriousness, inquisitiveness, and eagerness "to gather from anywhere a worthy notion of God."²³² Especially the existential premiss of purification enables the students to walk in the footsteps of Moses, who received spiritual insight by undertaking it. In turn, purification opens the way to divine participation, which amounts to reproducing on a personal level reality's synergetic dimension. Diligent students are successful in deciphering the cosmic mystery when—becoming compatible with the creation's theological depths through purification—they receive the Spirit's teaching.²³³

Apart from its personal benefits for believers, the cosmic school supplies pertinent proofs against the three deviant forms of thought Basil addresses throughout the homilies. These are Manichaeism, astrology, and atheism. Against the first, the cosmic school demonstrates that the creation is good, replete with divine signs, and that people can acquire theological knowledge through contemplating the universe. Against the second, it teaches the royal dignity of humankind and its privileged relation with the creator, by which it is liberated from cosmic determinism.²³⁴ Against the third, it teaches its students to consider the universe from the vantage point of God—as theologically meaningful—from there surmising the wisdom needed to steer their choices

231 Rousseau, "Human Nature," 226.

232 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.9–11; 3.10.18–23.

233 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.42–46; 2.1.13–17; 3.1.29–31; 9.6.101–104. See Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 315–316.

234 *Hexaemeron* 9.2.31–47.

and actions. The following passage, which introduces the topic of the cosmic school, endorses some of these nuances.

The word “origin” (ἀρχή) shows you that an organising principle of sorts (τις τεχνικός λόγος) is what establishes the orderly array of visible things. The cosmos therefore is not meant either at random or without reason, being aggregated for a serviceable purpose and in order to be of great use to all beings. As it truly is a teaching ground for conscious souls and a school for divine knowledge (διδασκαλεῖον καὶ θεογνωσίας ἐστὶ παιδευτήριον), through the guidance of the visible and sensible things (διὰ τῶν ὁρωμένων καὶ αἰσθητῶν χειραγωγίαν) the mind is led to the contemplation of the invisible ones (πρὸς τὴν θεωρίαν τῶν ἀοράτων).²³⁵

The visible realm is a teaching ground (διδασκαλεῖον καὶ θεογνωσίας ἐστὶ παιδευτήριον) where the seekers of truth train in order to reach that which is not obvious in the rush of everyday life—namely, that there is order and purpose behind the veil of seeming chaos, that reality is irreducible to materiality, and that divine reason is the source of all that exists. Note the understanding of “origin” (ἀρχή) in Gen 1:1 as referring to the Logos (τις τεχνικός λόγος), without whom the created reality can neither exist nor have a meaning. We encountered similar perceptions in Clement, Origen, and Evagrius’ christological protocols for retrieving a sense of cosmic meaningfulness. Accordingly, this training leads to a comprehensive grasp of reality, theological in nature, wholly opposed to the reductionist worldview which denies, together with God, the purposeful complexity of the universe.

This passage echoes the one on the failure of the ancient *physiologoi* to discern the signature of a creator and provident God within natural phenomena.²³⁶ If we combine the message of these passages, the earlier criticism amounts to saying that the *physiologoi* failed to appreciate, together with the meaningful nature of the cosmos, its role as theological school. But the passage under consideration goes beyond criticism, showing the actual workings of the school, the mechanics of natural contemplation (θεωρία). Not all the elements discussed in the foregoing are present here, but the method is still discernible.

The school works because Genesis, represented by its initial word, ἀρχή, “origin,” provides the christological lens through which one must consider the cosmos. It instructs one to gaze beyond the phenomenal side of reality, which

²³⁵ Hexaemeron 1.6.8–16.

²³⁶ Hexaemeron 1.2.5–12.

has the function of a guide (διὰ τῶν ὁρωμένων καὶ αἰσθητῶν χειραγωγίαν), and so acquire a fuller understanding of the universe by retrieving its invisible side through contemplation (πρὸς τὴν θεωρίαν τῶν ἀοράτων). In practical terms, the cosmos works as a theological school when the reader of Genesis believes in the divine origin of all things, the “organising principle” whose intention constitutes the foundation of cosmic order and the source of its meaningfulness. So understood, Basilian natural theology, for want of a better word, does not build purely rational proofs of God meant to lead an unbeliever to divine knowledge through logical inferences from the existence of the ordered universe. Instead, it consists in the exercise of reason guided by faith within an authenticated framework, namely, the scriptural narrative of creation. But when one becomes as experienced as Moses or Basil himself in natural contemplation, one learns the lessons of the school directly. Either way, the above passage confirms what we have seen already, that Basil’s cosmic school is reserved for believers.

At the cosmic school the diligent students learn how to discern the lessons which the “untaught law of nature” implicitly delivers. Basil makes clear that “nothing is without a cause, nothing is there spontaneously; there is a certain ineffable wisdom in all things.”²³⁷ Wisdom has many facets. The cosmic school teaches awareness of the other side of reality, which transcends the “visible and sensible,” the obvious and the palpable. Corresponding to the lesson of the body’s upright stature, which reflects the soul’s nobility,²³⁸ the ordered universe discloses its immaterial depths, its inner intelligibility. The latter, in turn, denotes the divine “origin” of everything. Furthermore, the cosmic school teaches that within the universe all things have a “serviceable purpose” and are mutually useful, as a teleological functionality is inherent to all things.²³⁹ Created by the good, wise, and powerful God, the cosmos is useful, beautiful, and vast.²⁴⁰ These lessons surpass a merely rational interest in understanding the universe and quantitative assessments. Last, but not least, in harmony with the earlier efforts to render the world liveable for Christians, Basil’s cosmic school teaches one to enjoy the world, God’s creation.

237 Οὐδὲν ἀναίτιον· οὐδὲν ἀπὸ ταῦτομάτου· πάντα ἔχει τινὰ σοφίαν ἀπόρρητον (*Hexaemeron* 5.8.15–16).

238 *Hexaemeron* 9.2.31–47.

239 According to Giet, “Introduction,” 61–62, Basil’s teleology is Aristotelian.

240 ἐποίησεν ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὸ χρήσιμον, ὡς σοφὸς, τὸ κάλλιστον, ὡς δυνατὸς, τὸ μέγιστον (“being good, (God) created something useful; being wise, something most beautiful; being powerful, something immense”; *Hexaemeron* 1.7.27–28). We shall see below, in Chapters Six and Seven, that the topics of teleology and functionality are recurrent in the thinking of the fourth- and fifth-century Christian writers.

Without referring to *Hexaemeron*, Yannaras must have been thinking of the message of the cosmic school when he posited that the human experience in the world cannot be reduced to dry scientific descriptions, economic interests, and leisurely pursuits.²⁴¹ The sciences ignore aspects of reality that fall outside their purview, examining the parts and missing the whole or counting the trees and missing the forest. The economic rationale suffocates the soul, depriving it of the sense of awe for the meaningful beauty of things. In turn, leisure, in its current sense, connotes mindlessness and superficiality; it is not the same as the ancient leisure, *σχολή*, which enabled contemplation.²⁴² In turn, Basil's cosmic school teaches that the world is irreducible to merely one dimension. The school encourages inquisitiveness and exploration, but not at the expense of awareness of the whole and practicality. And it encourages the cultivation of practical sense, but not at the expense of enjoyment and the spiritual criteria.

Corresponding to what we discovered above, in Chapters Three and Four, the inclusivity of these lessons originates in a sense of wonder. The strenuous explorer has to approach the cosmos with profound sensitivity, cultivating an apophatic reverence for nature and its maker.²⁴³ What conditions this apophatic lens is Genesis, which instructs the contemplative persons to recognise beauty in all of God's creations.²⁴⁴ God is beautiful²⁴⁵ and so is God's creation.²⁴⁶ This scripturally anchored reverence, an alternative to all kinds of reductionism, permeates Basil's exclamation: "Let us cease talking about the οὐσία, the essence (of things), since Moses convinced us that God created the sky and the earth."²⁴⁷ Believers must avoid any oversimplifications of reality, such as the reduction of things to their essence, οὐσία, or to quan-

241 Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, 50–52.

242 I am grateful to David Runia for this nuance.

243 Various scholars discussed Basil's apophatic approach. Blowers, *Drama*, 9, 109, 124, 126–128. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea*, 138. Gunton, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 59–60. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 33, 50. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 50–53, 65–66. Rousseau, *Basil*, 323.

244 The LXX version of Genesis repeatedly reads ὅτι καλόν in relation to the goodness of the creation (Gen 1:4, 8, 10, 13, 18, 21, 25, 31). The first meaning of the word καλός is beauty. Basil is not insensitive to this nuance. See *Hexaemeron* 2.7; 3.10; 4.6 etc. For the function of beauty in *Hexaemeron*, see Costache, "Apologetic, Moral și Mistic," 42–43 and Marinescu, "Despre lumină," 230–232. Giet, "Introduction," 58–59, traced the use of beauty in *Hexaemeron* back to Plato's *Timaeus*.

245 τὸ πολυπόθητον κάλλος ("much desired beauty"; *Hexaemeron* 1.2.46).

246 τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὁρωμένων ("the beauty of things visible"; *Hexaemeron* 1.11.46–47).

247 *Hexaemeron* 1.11.42–45. See Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 33; Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 393–394; Rousseau, *Basil*, 322. Basil's position, here, corresponds to that taken in *Against Eunomius* on both divine and created essences. See Basil, *Against Eunomius* 1.12.1–13.44.

tities, numbers, and the economical rationale. Instead, they must rejoice at the sight of a complex cosmos that speaks of its creator through the concrete beauty of its making. In commenting on the third day of creation, Basil urges:

I want you to imprint within yourself an utmost sense of wonder (σφοδρότερον τὸ θαῦμα) for the creation, so that—irrespective of where you are and whatever plants you may be finding—they distinctly elicit remembrance of the creator (τοῦ ποιήσαντος τὴν ὑπόμνησιν) in you.²⁴⁸

Developing “an utmost sense of wonder” (σφοδρότερον τὸ θαῦμα) at the beauty of creation, believers become philosophers, exercising “remembrance of the creator” (τοῦ ποιήσαντος τὴν ὑπόμνησιν). This will lead them eventually to seeing God. In so doing, they emulate the experience of Moses, Basil, and any other contemplative saints.

Following this passage is a series of lessons that plants teach when, after Origen's fashion, they are contemplated as anthropological metaphors. It is significant that plants, like the rest of the creation, are useful in more than one way. They are not only food for animals and human beings. They showcase divine wisdom. They are silent words, roadsigns which—in the Platonic manner of the Cappadocians²⁴⁹—point upwards to God. Basil broadens his botanical examples to the scale of the universe, suggesting that the cosmic school gestures to God in the doxological mode,²⁵⁰ teaching the seekers to acknowledge the creator and to interpret all things in the light of God's presence and purpose.²⁵¹ Also echoing the approach of such early theologians as Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Clement, the wisdom lessons of the cosmic school match the liturgical reverence of the church assembly. Louth confirmed the liturgical substance of Basil's approach in *Hexaemeron*.²⁵²

248 *Hexaemeron* 5.2.35–38. This exhortation is reminiscent of Philo's distinction between admiring the creation and praising the creator. See Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 458–461. But, here, Basil summarises the cosmic mindset and ecological sensitivity of the entire patristic tradition. See Foltz, *Byzantine Incursions*, 96–97.

249 Bradshaw, “Plato in the Cappadocians,” 194–195.

250 τὴν κοινὴν τῆς κτίσεως χοροστασίαν ... ἁρμονίως συμπληροῖ τὴν ὑμνωδίαν τῷ ποιητῇ (“the communal choir of the creation harmoniously completes a hymn to the creator”; *Hexaemeron* 3.9.40–43). See Blowers, “Beauty,” 13.

251 He rehearses the same argument in *Homily 5: On Martyr Julitta* 3 (PG 31: 244BC). See on this Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1995), 55–56.

252 Louth, “Basil and the Fathers,” 73–74.

It is in this vein that at the end of his first homily, Basil, most befittingly, breaks out in praise, showing how the cosmic school works by way of vertical analogies. Here is the relevant passage:

Let us glorify the noble artist for all that has been wisely and artistically (σοφῶς καὶ ἐντέχνως) done. From the beauty of things visible let us reflect upon the one who is supremely beautiful (ἐκ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὁρωμένων τὸν ὑπέρκαλον ἐννοώμεθα), and from the majesty of these finite bodies accessible through senses let us make an analogy for the one who is boundless, supremely magnificent, and who surpasses all understanding by the fullness of his power.²⁵³

These exhortations agree with Basil's view, expressed early on, that the seeker should be watchful to gather from anywhere "a worthy notion of God."²⁵⁴ But the passage does more than that; it discloses the manner in which believing students must proceed. The lessons are administered through the universe's ordered and beautiful array (σοφῶς καὶ ἐντέχνως). As in the example of Moses, diligent students are to ponder these lessons in search of higher theological meanings. The end of the search is seeing God (ἐκ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὁρωμένων τὸν ὑπέρκαλον ἐννοώμεθα). And since the cosmic school operates analogically—in anagogic fashion—students must progress step by step through successive inferences. Blowers has shown that this process replicates the anagogical interpretation of Scripture.²⁵⁵

The dispositions of awe and doxology, central to the above excerpt, are consistent with the method outlined in the prologue and elsewhere in the homilies.²⁵⁶ It is very possible that these dispositions are not unrelated to the purification required for the interpretive endeavour.²⁵⁷ Of further interest is that the excerpt refers to the correspondence between the exploratory approach and the object of contemplation. Earlier we have discovered that the universe's synergetic mystery requires an existential compatibility between the contemplative seeker and the Holy Spirit. In turn, here, the seeker of truth is prompted to enter into the doxological approach—"let us glorify the noble artist"²⁵⁸—

253 *Hexaemeron* 1.11.45–51. See Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 136 and Rousseau, *Basil*, 329.

254 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.10–11.

255 Blowers, "Contemplation of Nature," 148–149.

256 Louth ("The Fathers on Genesis," 570–571) identified another passage which conveys the same ideas.

257 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.8.

258 *Hexaemeron* 1.11.45–46.

the very manner in which, as we read elsewhere, the cosmic school delivers its lessons.²⁵⁹ In the same vein, several lines after the passage quoted above, the end of the homily maintains the doxological approach by showing that whether or not we understand how things are made, our sense of wonder at creation's beauty—of each and every being and phenomenon within the cosmos—must be surpassed only by the desire to praise the creator.²⁶⁰ The pedagogy of the cosmic school invites us to a *lectio divina* not only of the divinely inspired Scriptures, but also of the divinely created universe. The cosmic school teaches its students to read the “other scripture” of the world according to the same rules applicable to scriptural interpretation.

Building on earlier contributions, Basil's theological school of the cosmos had become normative for the Byzantine monastic milieu, which generalised the contemplation of nature as a spiritual exercise.²⁶¹ The same representation of the world can be profitably adjusted to the current parameters of Christian life, leading to an enriched human experience and a dignified approach to nature.²⁶²

4 Conclusions

Basil's input to the formation of the early Christian worldview remains a source of inspiration to this day. When given proper consideration, his contributions, particularly on the topic of the cosmic school, encourage a fresh approach to the quest for meaning and purpose within a hypermodern culture suffocating in reductionism, nihilism, and atheism. His enthusiastic appreciation for life, the environment, and the cosmos represents an implicit exhortation for our culture to acknowledge creation as God's gift and to adopt a corresponding lifestyle. Modern mainstream Christians are habituated to seeking divine knowledge and guidance for their spiritual experience in the Scriptures and the proclaimed faith of the church. Basil proved—from the vantage point of that same scripturally rooted faith—that divine knowledge and wisdom for life can be found everywhere in the world, at least when people look at God's creation with purified eyes and a sense of wonder.

Basil showed that within the same cosmos and through the lens of the same scripturally anchored faith, one can discern traces of the divine mechanism dis-

259 *Hexaemeron* 3.9.40–43.

260 *Hexaemeron* 1.11.51–57.

261 Blowers, *Drama*, 328–335.

262 Dumitru Stăniloae (*Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, 1:354–360) picked up on this idea.

cretely at work in the heart of reality, as in the principle of synergy. The latter is of great importance for the theology of creation. The notion of the interactive aspect of reality opens up new contemplative vistas of the divine presence within the cosmos and the universe's purposeful dynamism. The above analysis has brought to the fore his profound understanding of the mode of God's presence and activity in the world, neither above nor against nature, but respectful of its potential and its rhythms. His solution lay in the proclamation of a humble or kenotic God—to paraphrase Edwards again—ever at work in the creation's natural potential, linking it to the ongoing making of the universe in view of its eschatological fulfilment. The construct of a universe in the making within the parameters of the principle of synergy can serve as an invitation to a renewed conversation between theologians and scientists, a conversation free of antagonistic ideologies like naturalism vs supernaturalism or evolutionism vs creationism.

Moreover, Basil showed that, corresponding to the universe itself, the Christian representation of reality is not made once and for all. We have seen above that he reconsidered Genesis and its various early Christian interpretations within his own context, in order to commend the doctrine of creation to his Hellenised contemporaries. Following his example—and motivated by apologetic, missional, and pastoral concerns—the theological message of the Christian worldview must be rephrased again and again in relation to the shifting cultural and scientific paradigms throughout history.

Last but not least, he contrived to bring the cosmos from the periphery of theological concerns into their centre. In so doing, while he built on the contributions of his traditional predecessors, he introduced the representation of reality as a topic of utmost significance for the Christian experience and for later theological developments. Gregory of Nyssa, followed in his footsteps.

Description and Interpretation

Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, appropriated the method at work in *Hexaemeron* and developed it with a particular reference to Christian cosmology.¹ In what follows I explore his largely ignored treatise, *Apology*, which illustrates perfectly the way he handled the method. Its critical edition became available little more than a decade ago.² Having taken as a starting point of his analysis the first four creation days in Genesis, he discussed the origins of the universe and a range of natural phenomena. These he treated at the junction of physical discourse and theological interpretation. Given the limited scholarly interest in *Apology* and the misunderstandings related to its genre, I must consider the particularities of this work before I turn to aspects of Gregory's cosmological contributions.

First there is the context and nature of *Apology*, its relation to Basil's *Hexaemeron*, the author's use of the Genesis narrative of creation, and his interest in the natural sciences. I propose that this treatise, usually taken as a defence of *Hexaemeron*, does not advocate Basil's position. Nor does it continue the ideation of his homilies. Despite his statements of love and devotion, Gregory seeks to assert his own scholarly prowess and is not interested in securing his brother's legacy. That this is so transpires through the method he deploys within the treatise, at odds with Basil's and consistent with his own agenda. The differences are striking. Basil was exegetically committed. He also was pastorally motivated to stir in the average believer an appreciation for God's creation, in order to inspire an ethical conduct and a doxological attitude. In turn, Gregory uses Genesis as a pretext for his own discourse. To please his brother Peter—together with the demanding readership the latter represented³—he treats Genesis and cosmic phenomena scientifically.⁴

1 This chapter reutilises material from my studies, "Making Sense of the World" and "Approaching *An Apology for the Hexaemeron*," which it presents in a completely new and expanded form.

2 *Gregorii Nysseni In Hexaemeron: Opera Exegetica in Genesim*, part one, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

3 For the learnt readership of *Apology*, see Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 155. Juan Antonio Gil-Tamayo, "Akolouthia," in *BDGN*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, revised English edn, trans. Seth Cherney (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 14–20, esp. 14.

4 A range of scholars have compared Gregory and Basil's approaches. Gil-Tamayo, "Akolouthia," 14. Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 155. Panayiotis Chrestou, "Εἰσαγωγὴ," in *Γρηγορίου Νύσσης Ἀπαντα τὰ*

Louth aptly observed that—their intersecting lives and theological affinities notwithstanding—Basil, Gregory, and their friend, Gregory “the Theologian” of Constantinople, “had individual minds.”⁵ In the same vein, Blowers and Lollar noted recently that the cosmological sensitivities of the three authors differed considerably.⁶

In the same part of this chapter I discuss the genre to which *Apology* belongs. Scholars see it as an exegetical work. For example, taking his cue from the established opinion, Behr asserted that here Gregory is interested in exploring “the inner coherence of the scriptural narratives, the internal sequence (ἀκολουθία) that they present,” as well as “the order and sequence within the progressive development of creation itself.” This would have been contrary to Basil’s approach who supposedly built a complete cosmology while he relegated exegesis to a secondary position.⁷ This judgment needs amendment. As we found out in Chapter Five, Basil referred to scientific knowledge, but he engaged the creation narrative in the traditionally patristic, line-by-line mode of interpretation. We shall soon discover that Gregory, in turn, merely framed his discourse theologically with the aid of the scriptural narrative. Genesis does not constitute the object of his exegesis, instead serving as a backdrop for a rigorously scientific description of the world. *Apology*, indeed, illustrates Gregory’s intention to make sense of nature in strictly physical terms or, to paraphrase Zachhuber, to “develop an account of concrete being.”⁸ In short, and as its very title indicates, this work belongs with the apologetic genre, not with exegesis.⁹ The apologetic classification is consistent with its goal to bridge theology and the scientific culture of the time for the articulation of a Christian worldview able to satisfy an elite readership.

In the second part of this chapter I consider certain particularities of Gregory’s worldview—his naturalistic approach to reality, his rich concept of mat-

⁵ *Εργα*, vol. 5: *Ἀπολογητικὸς περὶ τῆς Ἑξαήμερου*, ed. P. Chrestou (Thessaloniki: Byzantium and Gregory Palamas, 1987), 7–16, esp. 10. Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 8–9.

⁶ Louth, “The Cappadocians,” 289. See also Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 7–8.

⁷ Blowers, “Beauty,” 8–9. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 120.

⁸ Behr, *Christian Theology*, 2.2:411. Other scholars share the view that exegesis is *Apology*’s main goal. McGuckin, “Patterns,” 49. Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, ECF (London: Routledge, 2002), 5. Manlio Simonetti, “Exegesis,” in *BDGN*, 331–338, esp. 336.

⁹ Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 58.

¹⁰ The critical edition lists it among the *Opera Exegetica in Genesim*; conspicuously, the word “apology” was left out by the work’s modern editor. Cf. Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans. by S.S. Schatzmann (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 279. In turn, long ago Callahan (“Greek Philosophy,” 31, 33) voiced doubts about the exegetical rigour of *Apology*.

ter, and the theme of creation as a single event and multiple events. The space he allocated for physical discourse remains unusual for the patristic tradition. We shall discover however that, as Basil, Gregory was not unaware of the respective competences of science and theology. What he did was endeavour to synthesise their input into a comprehensive, nuanced, and multilayered representation of reality. In doing so, he showed the way theologians might approach any scientific descriptions of nature.

1 Introducing Gregory's *Apology*

The treatise under consideration did not make a noticeable impact upon the later patristic literature. As we shall see this is primarily because of the thinness of its theological content. We already know that it has not elicited an enthusiastic response from contemporary scholarship either—not even after the release of its critical edition. Scholars do focus on Gregory's better known *Constitution*, considered an anthropological appendix of Basil's *Hexaemeron*, but overall they ignore *Apology*,¹⁰ perhaps seeing it as an appendix of the appendix. This lack of interest might also be indicative of the apprehension humanities scholars experience regarding the hard sciences, as I discussed in the introduction to this book. There are exceptions of course,¹¹ but Köckert's detailed analysis of *Apology* remains the only major study available so far.¹²

To establish when the *Apology* was written is a challenging task. Contemporary scholars have pointed out the impossibility of determining the exact chronology of Gregory's works;¹³ his writings refer to historical events only infrequently. My analysis does not require the exact dating of either *Apology* or

10 Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 31–37. Ronald E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, OECTS (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 7. Kannengiesser, *Handbook*, 753. Louth, "The Cappadocians," 299. John Anthony McGuckin, "St Gregory of Nyssa: Bishop, Philosopher, Exegete, Theologian," in *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Studies*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Neil B. McLynn (Oxford University Press, 2018), 7–28, esp. 23–26 (but *Apology* is mentioned in passing at 17 and merely alluded to at 24).

11 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 154–157. Chrestou, "Εἰσαγωγή," 7–16. Costache, "Making Sense of the World," 1–29; "Approaching An *Apology* for the *Hexaemeron*," 53–81. Charlotte Köckert, "The Concept of Seed in Christian Cosmology: Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia in Hexaemeron*," *SP* 47 (2010): 27–32. Juan Antonio Gil-Tamayo, "HEX: Apologia in Hexaemeron," in *BDGN*, 387–389.

12 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 400–525.

13 Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 279. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 8. Pierre Maraval, "Chronology of Works," in *BDGN*, 153–169, esp. 153, 157. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 53–54.

the anthropological treatise which, according to an authorial note,¹⁴ precedes it, namely, *Constitution*. Suffice it to say that although not all scholars share this opinion¹⁵ very possibly both works were published in the frenzy that followed Basil's death.¹⁶ The significance of this matter will soon be apparent.

Together with the preceding anthropological treatise, Gregory dedicated *Apology* to a younger brother, Peter. According to the prologue, Peter asked Gregory to clarify several obscure points in Genesis, which Basil left unaddressed and for which, posthumously, he became the target of unnamed critics.¹⁷ Interestingly, as Bouteneff noticed, the criticisms levelled at Basil's *Hexaemeron* coincide with the concerns of Peter himself;¹⁸ one might well wonder whether he was the actual source of the anonymous queries. But what matters are the queries. One refers to Basil's silence about the succession of days and nights in the initial stages of creation. Given that Genesis mentions the sun and other celestial bodies only on the fourth day, this sequence is a puzzle. Basil could have at least mentioned this discrepancy.¹⁹ Another difficulty he left unaddressed is Genesis' failure to mention the third heaven of 2Cor 12:2.²⁰ The

14 *Apology* 77.84.3 (epilogue).

15 A number of scholars placed the two writings in 379. Teodor Bodogae, "Introducere," in *Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa: Scrieri*, second part: *Scrieri Exegetice, Dogmatico-Polemice și Morale*, trans. T. Bodogae, PSB 30 (București: EIBMBOR, 1998), 9–14, esp. 10, 12. Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 31. Gil-Tamayo, "HEX," 387. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 40. Other scholars referred to ca. 380. Köckert, "The Seed," 27. Jean Laplace, "Introduction," in *Grégoire de Nysse: La Création de l'Homme*, SC 6 (Paris and Lyon: Cerf and Éditions de l'Abeille, 1943), 5–77, esp. 4. Simonetti, "Exegesis," 331. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works: A Literary Study*, OECs (Oxford University Press, 2018), 65. Based on Gregory's reference to his works on creation in *Against Eunomius*, O'Brien ("Creation," 9) proposed the timeframe between Basil's death and Gregory's anti-Eunomian treatise (possibly published in 381). Yet other scholars pushed the date between 380 and 386. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 53 and *Gregory of Nyssa*, 5. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 7. Very generally, Kannengiesser (*Handbook*, 753) suggested that much of Gregory's literary output was produced in the last fifteen years of his life. Quasten (*Patrology*, 3:256, 263) corroborated the possibility of a later redaction.

16 Zachhuber (*The Rise of Christian Theology*, 55) is right to point out the many concerns and tasks that faced Gregory at the time.

17 One of these critics could have been Theodore of Mopsuestia. See Pascal Mueller-Jourdain, "La question de l'âme des animaux dans *De Opificio Mundi* de Jean Philopon (VI^e s.): Entre révélation biblique et psychologie aristotélécienne," in *La restauration de la création: Quelle place pour les animaux?* ed. Michele Cutino et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 135–156, esp. 137. For an overview of these queries, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 400–401.

18 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 154.

19 *Apology* 3.8.12–9.1.

20 *Apology* 3.9.1–9. We shall see below that Gregory attempts to answer this question in *Apology* 75.81.1–76.83.9, by identifying the third heaven with the noetic realm. On Gregory's

traditional reading of Scripture held it as “one book” containing a coherent narrative of God’s economy.²¹ How could Genesis, as divinely inspired as the rest of the biblical collection, ignore cosmographical data of significance? Making himself the springboard of these queries, Peter added his own wish to have Gregory determine the logic of the creation story and to harmonise Genesis with Scripture in its entirety.²² He also desired to hear about “the necessary order of creation.”²³

Scholars, such as Behr, quoted above,²⁴ rightly identify Peter’s queries as the main concerns of Gregory himself. The two siblings may have shared the same views or, possibly, Gregory ascribed to Peter his own interests. More important is that, at face value, Peter wished to make sense of the world both empirically and through the lens of the scriptural narrative. His quest was not deprived of traditional resonance, echoing the approach of the Alexandrian masters, Clement and Origen. Judging from Gregory’s answer, however, particularly his lengthy and erudite expositions on natural phenomena, it seems that Peter was much more interested in the cosmic order than in the scriptural account on creation. It is furthermore possible that, regardless of Peter’s expectations, Gregory discussed only matters that he considered to be of significance.

Prudently, Gregory’s response to the criticisms Peter conveyed justifies the choice that Basil made to circumvent the more enigmatic aspects of Genesis by evoking his pastoral concerns. He shows that their elder brother adopted an approach aimed at instructing the rather mixed audiences of his homilies, educated and uneducated.²⁵ Since the anonymous detractors did not grasp “the true purpose pertaining to the teaching of our father” (a criticism that may have been likewise aimed at Peter), Gregory perforce dismisses both their objections and the queries of his brother.²⁶ In regard to Peter’s other interest, in mystical speculation—“the darkness of vision of ineffable things”²⁷ inaccessible to those at the foothills of Sinai, uneducated and unworthy—he urged

interest in this Pauline text, see James Buchanan Wallace, *Snatched into Paradise* (2 Cor 12:1–10): *Paul’s Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2011), 304–312.

21 Virtually no early Christian interpreters diverged from the rule Origen outlined, that the Scriptures were one book, one “gospel” as it were. Cf. *On John* 1.6.33–34; 1.6.36.

22 *Apology* 1.6.4–6, prologue.

23 τὴν ἀναγκάσιαν τῆς κτίσεως τάξιν (*Apology* 5.11.8).

24 Behr, *Christian Theology*, 2.2:411.

25 *Apology* 4.9.16–11.2. See also Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 134.

26 *Apology* 4.9.16–17. See Gil-Tamayo, “HEX,” 388.

27 τὸν γνόφον τῆς τῶν ἀπορρήτων θεωρίας (*Apology* 5.11.3–8). The phrase anticipates Gregory’s famous depiction of Moses’ ascent on Sinai as a mystical experience in *Life of Moses* 2.82.4–86.10. For a recent analysis of Moses’ profile in Gregory’s celebrated ascetic treatise

him to pray and to heed “the Spirit of revelation.”²⁸ Echoes of Basil’s warning about purification as a prerequisite for higher contemplation²⁹ are audible here. Equally discernible is Gregory’s own take on catharsis as conditioning true knowledge, addressed in an earlier work, *On Virginity*.³⁰ In reminding his younger brother about the need for prayerful life and divine illumination, he shows his awareness of the difficulties involved in the task at hand.³¹ That said, on Peter’s encouragement he eventually accepted the challenge.³²

His search for an account on the order of creation in Genesis surprisingly amounts to taking the scriptural narrative as an occasion for the scientific analysis of physical phenomena. There is nothing mystical or spiritual about his approach. While embarking on this task, Gregory states his admiration for Basil’s homilies, whose authority on such topics is yet unsurpassed. By contrast, he humbly continues, his *Apology* represents a conjectural scholarly gymnastic,³³ a draft essay or an “intellectual exercise,”³⁴ not an authoritative interpretation of Genesis.³⁵ Here, he continues Origen’s approach in *Principles*,³⁶ discussed in Chapter Three.

Given the tentative nature of *Apology*’s discourse, the shape and content of this “puzzling text,”³⁷ as Bouteneff characterised it, are worth noting. Compared with the rigorously structured *Constitution*—a befitting sequel to Basil’s *Hexaemeron*, known for its elegance—*Apology* presents no discernible order. Its unstructured layout is at odds with Gregory’s claimed commitment to the principle of ordered sequence, ἀκολουθία.³⁸ It looks more like a draft or a sketch. The division of the text in numbered sections belongs to modern editors³⁹ and

in historical perspective, see Susanna Elm, “Dressing Moses: Reading Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Moses* Literally,” in *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa*, 49–73.

28 *Apology* 5.13.4–6.

29 *Hexaemeron* 1.1.6–18. See on this the last sections of Chapter Five, above.

30 *On Virginity* 11.1.21–26. See Bradshaw, “Plato in the Cappadocians,” 200.

31 See also, briefly, Costache, “Christian Gnosis,” 263–264, with reference to similar matters in Gregory’s *Life of Moses*.

32 *Apology* 6.14.6–12.

33 ὥς ἐν γυμνασίῳ ... στοχαστικῶς (“as though exercising by guesswork”; *Apology* 6.13.17). Migne’s *PG* and Chrestou’s edition read σχολαστικῶς (“pedantically”) instead of στοχαστικῶς.

34 The phrase belongs to Gil-Tamayo, “HEX,” 388.

35 *Apology* 6.13.11–14.2.

36 See Crouzel, *Origène*, 222–223.

37 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 154. For the unstructured look of *Apology*, see O’Brien, “Creation,” 10.

38 On this principle as central to *Apology*, see Gil-Tamayo, “Akolouthia,” 16.

39 The two modern editions do not correspond from this viewpoint. Drobner’s edition gives

should not be seen as the author's purposeful arrangement of the material. The only noticeable structure within *Apology* is the creation narrative, to which it loosely adheres. The overall impression of the treatise is of ad hoc notes on Gen 1:1–19 leading to lengthy cosmological, astronomical, and physical considerations. Often, the treatise abandons a certain topic for ample scientific digressions, only to return to it and then to leave it again. At times, as Monique Alexandre pointed out,⁴⁰ Gregory returns to the same topic in different or even contradictory ways. Briefly put, *Apology* constitutes an unsystematic display of sophistication, a compendium of natural science whose flow is difficult to follow. Its unstructured aspect is but one matter that puzzles the reader.

Another curiosity is its blatant spiritual poverty, starkly contrasting with Gregory's other writings. It is true that the prologue rehearses the spiritual strategy of Basil; Johannes Quasten had confirmed this connection;⁴¹ but the treatise itself is a very pallid illustration of this strategy. While the Basilian homilies consistently exhort the audiences to embrace the Christian lifestyle, apart from the prologue *Apology* makes no reference to it. Instead, it focuses upon the universe's natural movement within divine parameters, the physics of light, the fundamental elements, and the cycles of water. As Bouteneff described the second part of the treatise,

It might just as well be entitled *On Fire, Light, and Especially Water*. It consists of page after page (fifteen columns in PG 44) of speculation about water, vapour, ice, and more water, and only then a (considerably shorter) discussion of light.⁴²

This being the case, the established view that *Apology* is spiritually, philosophically, and theologically significant⁴³—and that it contains “metaphysical spec-

seventy-eight chapters, whereas Chrestou's no less than a hundred and two. For a brief overview of the treatise, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 410–411.

40 Monique Alexandre, “L'Exégèse de Gen 1, 1–2a dans l'*In Hexaëmeron* de Grégoire de Nyse: Deux approches du problème de la matière,” in *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie: Zweites Internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa*, ed. Heinrich Dörrie et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 159–186, esp. 160–161.

41 Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:264.

42 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 156. The relevant chapters are *Apology* 33.46.12–38.51.7. O'Brien (“Creation,” 10) proposed that the discourse on water is directed against Basil's views. On the waters as the main topic of *Apology*, see Eugenio Corsini, “Nouvelles Perspectives sur le Problème des Sources de l'*Hexaëmeron* de Grégoire de Nyse,” *SP* 11 (1957): 94–103, esp. 97, 100.

43 See Blowers, “Contemplation of Nature,” 157 and Chrestou, “Εἰσαγωγή,” 11.

ulations"⁴⁴—is not justified. The lengthy treatment of natural phenomena on scientific grounds is not metaphysical speculation. Gregory's identification of the third heaven with the intelligible domain⁴⁵ and his interpretation of the waters above the firmament as designating the angelic powers⁴⁶ do not change this fact.

On this note, a brief point on Gregory's exegetical method is in order. In a couple of instances he claims adherence to a literal approach to the creation narrative.⁴⁷ But the two examples of spiritualising exegesis just mentioned contradict this claim. They also contradict the scholarly consensus that in *Apology* he altogether renounces his customary allegorical preferences.⁴⁸ Given the available evidence, to characterise his approach to the creation narrative as either literal or spiritual is unwarranted. Giet aptly pointed out that Gregory's method was neither simply literal nor purely allegorical.⁴⁹ Soon it will become clear that this had to do with the authorial intention to engage the cultural context of his time rather than to produce a rigorous exegesis of the scriptural account. On this note, I must now turn to the scholarly consensus on the relation between *Apology* and *Hexaemeron*.

1.1 *Continuity or Discontinuity?*

As already mentioned, most scholars agree on dating Gregory's two works on creation, *Constitution* and *Apology*, soon after Basil's death. If this opinion holds, it clarifies several matters, particularly the spirit in which Gregory wrote these books, his odd references to his older brother, and his exhibiting sophistication. To understand his cast of mind, in turn, clarifies the issue of chronology, and, from my viewpoint, the evidence points to an earlier rather than a later redaction. What matters for now is the consensus that *Apology* was written soon after Basil's death. The importance of this aspect will emerge presently.

44 Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:264.

45 *Apology* 75.81.1–76.83.9.

46 *Apology* 19.32.4–7. For a brief elucidation of this passage, see O'Brien, "Creation," 10–11.

47 *Apology* 21.33.1–2; 77.83.10–18. See Hubertus R. Drobner, "Allegory," in *BDGN*, 21–26, esp. 21. In turn, Donald L. Ross proposed that *Apology* offers an allegorical interpretation of the creation and the world. See his "Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395 CE)" (section 3: 'World') published in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/gregoryn/>). Accessed July 2020.

48 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 156. Gil-Tamayo, "HEX," 387. McGuckin, "Patterns," 48. Simonetti, "Exegesis," 332–333.

49 Giet, "Introduction," 23. See also Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 27–30, but with reference to *Constitution*.

Scholars assume that there is a connection between Gregory's works on creation and *Hexaemeron*. Such a connection would mirror that between his *Against Eunomius* and Basil's tome of the same name.⁵⁰ Specifically, *Apology* would represent a corollary of *Hexaemeron* or its complement. In echoing the consensus,⁵¹ Anthony Meredith noted that much of Gregory's body of writings "was composed in direct response to the suggestion and memory of Basil," and that his treatises on Genesis represent "critical continuations of Basil's own works in the same areas."⁵² Given that the prologues of Gregory's works on creation duly acknowledge Basil's contribution as their starting point,⁵³ this opinion seems justified. Anna Silvas suggested in turn that, in a symbolic reenactment of the passing on of prophetic grace from Elijah on Elisha, in furthering Basil's legacy Gregory acted upon a mandate from his brother. Thus, on his deathbed Basil would have asked the younger Gregory to continue his work—a mission which the latter accomplished as a worthy "heir in doctrinal exposition."⁵⁴ In the same vein, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz concluded recently that "through a series of works, Gregory cemented his legacy as the definitive heir to Basil."⁵⁵ With or without prophetic analogies, to dismiss the connection between *Hexaemeron* and Gregory's works on Genesis, including the possibility of a Basilian mandate, is not to be undertaken lightly. That said, there is more to Gregory's diptych on creation, especially its second part, *Apology*, than veneration for his brother.

We have seen above that in the prolegomena to the treatise Gregory defends his recently departed sibling. I would propose however that *Apology*, overall, is about credentialing himself as a scholarly authority, not a way of safeguarding his brother's memory. If this is so, and others share this view,⁵⁶ the dominant opinion that Basil and Gregory's works on creation illustrate continuity must be revised. There is, indeed, a wealth of emotions pervading *Apology* that can

50 So Radde-Gallwitz, *A Literary Study*, 15; Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 279.

51 Chrestou, "Εἰσαγωγή," 10. Corsini, "Nouvelles Perspectives," 95. Louth, "The Cappadocians," 299. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:263. Simonetti, "Exegesis," 331.

52 Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 53. In his *Gregory of Nyssa*, 5, Meredith clarified the matter further by asserting that the two works continue and partially correct *Hexaemeron*.

53 *Constitution*, prologue (PG 44, 125BC). *Apology* 2.7.14–8.11 (prologue).

54 Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 40.

55 Radde-Gallwitz, *A Literary Study*, 17.

56 Laplace ("Introduction," 6) observed that while *Constitution* and *Apology* pretend to continue Basil's unfinished homilies, in reality the viewpoints of the two brothers are very different. See also Giet, "Introduction," 20–24, 73 and Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 18. I published my first critique of the "continuity" theory in my 2012 article, but Zachhuber (*The Rise of Christian Theology*, 55 n. 147) refers to it as supporting the received view.

scarcely be associated with fraternal reverence. And there is, of course, the paucity of Gregory's reference to Basil's teaching—indeffensible if *Apology* is meant as a complement to *Hexaemeron*. It is with these issues that I deal in what follows.

The intense emotions he experienced upon writing *Constitution* and *Apology* are unmistakeable. There is a shared opinion among scholars that the gigantic figure of Basil eclipsed Gregory's early career and that he emerged out of the woods of anonymity only after his brother departed.⁵⁷ He seems to have greatly resented the reputation of his sibling. However this may be, both his recognition and literary output—for he took to writing massively—significantly increased after his brother's death. A careful reader notices behind his works on creation, especially *Apology*, a sense of frustration with Basil's towering figure. Better camouflaged in *Constitution*—a work intended to fill the gaps left by the Basilian homilies in the treatment of the creation narrative—irritation appears to trigger in Gregory the desire to prove his worth. What is supposed to be a prudent statement in the prologue confirms my point. There, Gregory affirms that in completing Basil's unfinished anthropology his concern is to ensure that the teacher's glory is not diminished in his disciples.⁵⁸ This is to say that he is no less proficient than his brother.

In the months passing after Basil's repose, this nuance reappeared in *Apology*. The prologue contains the stunning proposition—suspiciously accompanied by repeated expressions of respect⁵⁹—that this work improves on Basil's teaching on the creation the way a noble sprout boosts the natural qualities of a lower class tree when grafted onto it.⁶⁰ No proof of reverence here and only a careless reader would take *Apology* as a defence of *Hexaemeron*, as certain scholars do.⁶¹ After years of frustration, this was Gregory's time to affirm his presence. Signs of his effort to surpass Basil in knowledge, refinement, and logic mark the writing, betraying the impetuosity of someone eager to conquer the stage after Elvis had left the building. Thus, he openly states that his position regarding the workings of fire within all things created is at variance with his sibling's, yet no less appropriate and wise.⁶² Köckert discussed at length a sim-

57 Behr, *Christian Theology*, 2.2:411. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 53. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 13–14, 40.

58 *Constitution*, prologue (PG 44, 125C).

59 *Apology* 1.6.13–7.3; 2.7.17–8.8.

60 *Apology* 2.7.18–8.11.

61 Chrestou, "Εἰσαγωγή," 11. Drobner, "Allegory," 21. Gil-Tamayo, "HEX," 387. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 402.

62 *Apology* 28.41.12–42.6.

ilar situation, his disagreement with Basil over the cycle of water in nature.⁶³ That Gregory sought to assert himself is obvious. Ronald Heine identified this defiant attitude in other of his writings from that period, such as the treatise *On the Inscriptions of the Psalms*.⁶⁴ Piecing together this information, it results that, together with revealing Gregory's assertive intentions, the strong emotional undertones of *Apology* confirm the opinion which places it soon after Basil's death.

Other hints tell that *Apology* is not about continuing the Basilian homilies on creation. The title of the work, *An Apology for the Hexaemeron*, does not clarify its true object. Is it meant to defend the "hexaemeron," namely, the scriptural narrative of the six days, or Basil's *Hexaemeron*? The prologue is equally unhelpful. It mentions, we have seen, queries about Genesis and Basil's homilies. It also points out, correspondingly, the "divine inspiration" of the scriptural narrative and Basil's "divinely inspired" interpretation of it.⁶⁵ The difficulty in tracing *Apology's* scope notwithstanding, there is indirect evidence that, here, Gregory is not concerned with the Basilian homilies. Except for the justification of Basil's pastoral approach, earlier mentioned, Gregory nowhere touches upon particular aspects pertaining to his brother's interpretation—not even when he points out, as in the reference to fire, the different view he upholds. Instead, he discusses matters of the creation narrative and, more so, cosmology and natural phenomena. His focus is on Genesis and matters of cosmology, not on Basil's work. Against this backdrop, I agree with Eugenio Corsini's assessment:

La façon dont Grégoire développe ses arguments n'est celle de quelqu'un qui défende la cause d'un autre. Toujours est-il qu'au lieu de résoudre les difficultés du traité de son frère, Grégoire développe une thèse qui non seulement n'est pas celle de Basile mais qui s'y oppose directement.⁶⁶

I discuss the specifics of Gregory's method in the next section. It follows that *Apology* was not designed as a defence and continuation of Basil's *Hexaemeron* and we must disabuse ourselves of this view. Gregory wished to consolidate

63 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 481–489, 491–505.

64 Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 9. Cf. Tina Dolidze, "INSCR: In Inscriptiones Psalmorum," in *BDGN*, 429–431, esp. 429.

65 *Apology* 1.6.1; 2.8.1.

66 Corsini, "Nouvelles Perspectives," 96 (see also 102). For a similar conclusion, see O'Brien, "Creation," 8. For further aspects of continuity and discontinuity, see O'Brien, "Creation," 12–17.

his own position as an independent thinker. The relation between *Hexaemeron* and *Apology* rather looks like a counterpoint. We shall see however that despite his intentions he could not entirely renounce Basil's views. To bring this matter to a close and borrowing Louth's comment about their different minds, I would reverse Bouteneff's assessment of the two brothers⁶⁷ and propose that, although related, still theirs remain two disparate voices. In saying this, I agree with Giet that, willingly or not, precisely Gregory's personality is what led him to pay the highest respect to his brother—by replicating his example in a creative manner.⁶⁸

I must now turn to Gregory's method and the literary genre to which *Apology* belongs. But first, a consideration of his manner of tackling Genesis and science.

1.2 *Managing Genesis and the Available Sciences*

We have seen above that the prologue refers to Peter's request that Gregory consider the narrative of creation as such against the broader scriptural context. Gregory should have discussed therefore the coherence of the Genesis account and its consistency with the scriptural doctrine of creation more generally. Several scholars, we know, concur in identifying textual analysis as the goal of the treatise. On closer inspection however almost nothing like exegetical rigour can be found in *Apology*. While John Anthony McGuckin's assessment that "the Bible is never present to him merely as margin illustration" can be applied to other of Gregory's works, this is by no means the case of *Apology*.⁶⁹ In what follows I question the current representation of *Apology* as an exegetical work and propose instead that Gregory's method belongs to the apologetic genre.

After the initial reference to Peter's queries, the coherence of the narrative of creation and its consistency with Scripture become secondary concerns for Gregory. He seldom quotes scriptural passages and he does not examine the textual parallels. When he refers to other scriptural material, he does that in order to borrow familiar words and images,⁷⁰ not as an authority meant to confirm his

67 Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 166, notes that it is about two "disparate, yet related, voices."

68 Giet, "Introduction," 73.

69 McGuckin, "St Gregory of Nyssa," 24.

70 Here are the references, either direct or in paraphrase, to scriptural parallels. *Apology* 3: 2 Cor 12:2 (the third heaven). *Apology* 5: Rom 1:20; 2 Cor 12:4 (gazing upon the unseen powers of God via the visible creation). *Apology* 9: Col 1:17 (all things exist due to God's power as their beginning). *Apology* 11: Ps 103:24 (all things are created through God's wisdom); Ps 18:2 (the heavens proclaim God's glory); Ps 18:4 (the voices of creation); Exod 7–14; Ps 104:27 (the plagues of Egypt). *Apology* 16: Ps 94:4 (all creation is in God's hands). *Apology* 17: 2 Macc 1:24 (God brings into being all creation). *Apology* 19: John 1:9; 1 Tim 6:16 (God

view of Genesis. Nor does he engage the narrative of creation in a meticulous fashion.⁷¹ Except for the first two verses of Genesis, which he analyses in detail, he refers only in passing to the rest of the text. Try as one might, between chapters 31 and 63 only one reference can be found—in chapter 44—to the account of creation. Before considering Gregory's method, attention should therefore be given to this sole example of genuine exegesis in *Apology*, the interpretation of Gen 1:1–2.⁷²

As a rule, and following the early Christian custom,⁷³ the Septuagint was Gregory's Scripture. It is therefore intriguing that for parts of the creation narrative, specifically its beginning, alongside the received text he consulted the translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. These other versions cir-

is light, dwelling in the transcendent light). *Apology* 19: Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29 (God as consuming fire); Eph 6:12 (the master of the world of darkness inhabiting the abyss); Ps 76:17 (the abyss troubled at God's sight). *Apology* 26: Ps 103:24; John 1:1 (the wisdom through which all are created is the Logos of God). *Apology* 31: Eccl 1:4 (the earth is established forever). *Apology* 42: Amos 5:8; 9:6 (God commands the waters). *Apology* 43: Gen 7:11, 19–20 (the heaven's cataracts). *Apology* 44: Luke 4:25; 3 Kings 17, 18:44–45; Gen 7:11; 4 Kings 7:2; Jas 5:17–18 (Elijah closing and opening the waterfalls of heaven). *Apology* 45: Isa 40:12 (God measuring the creation). *Apology* 65: Ps 135:7; 1 Cor 15:41 (the luminaries). *Apology* 69: Ps 103:24 (the greatness of God's creation). *Apology* 75: 2 Cor 12:2–4 (the third heaven). *Apology* 76: 2 Cor 4:18 (the visible and the invisible). None of these parallels contributes decisively to solve the issues raised in the prologue.

- 71 Here are the references, either direct or in paraphrase, to the Genesis creation narrative. *Apology* 7.14.13 (Gen 1:1). *Apology* 8.16.14–17.2; 17.12–13 (Gen 1:1). *Apology* 10.20.2–3; 21.1 (Gen 1:2; 1:3). *Apology* 12.22.22; 23.11–13, 18–19 (Gen 1:3; 1:4). *Apology* 13.24.15 (Gen 1:5). *Apology* 14.25.16–19 (Gen 1:3–5). *Apology* 15.26.1–2, 4–5 (Gen 1:5). *Apology* 16.26.17–18; 27.10, 14–15; 28.8–11 (Gen 1:1; 1:2). *Apology* 17.28.14–15 (Gen 1:2). *Apology* 18.30.2–5; 31.3–6 (Gen 1:5–8). *Apology* 19.31.10–11; 32.2–4 (Gen 1:2; 1:6–8). *Apology* 21.33.7–8, 9–10, 12–14, 15–16, 17–19 (Gen 1:3; 1:2; 1:6–8). *Apology* 23.35.7–9, 12–14, 17–18 (Gen 1:6–8). *Apology* 24.37.5–6, 9–10 (Gen 1:5; 1:8). *Apology* 26.39.13–15; 40.8–11 (Gen 1:8–9). *Apology* 27.40.16–17 (Gen 1:7). *Apology* 31.44.3–4, 10–13 (Gen 1:31). *Apology* 44.57.12–14; 58.1–2 (Gen 1:6–8). *Apology* 63.71.13–14 (Gen 1:6–7). *Apology* 64.71.20–21; 72.12–13 (Gen 1:13–17; 1:1). *Apology* 65.72.16, 73.7–9, 17–18 (Gen 1:3–5). *Apology* 66.74.3 (Gen 1:13). *Apology* 67.75.1–2 (Gen 1:16). *Apology* 70.76.15, 18 (Gen 1:13; 1:16–18). *Apology* 72.78.2–4, 6–7 (Gen 1:3–8; 1:10–12). *Apology* 73.79.1–2, 5–6, 9, 15–17 (Gen 1:3–5, 13, 16, 19). *Apology* 75.81.16–17; 82.2–10, 13–14 (Gen 1:8; 1:20, 26; 1:6; 1:16–17). *Apology* 77.83.18–84.1 (Gen 1 as ἐξάήμερον κοσμογένειαν, “the creation of the world in six days”), 84.3 (Gen 1:26–27 as ἀνθρώπου κατασκευής, “the structure of the human being”).

- 72 For a detailed analysis of Gregory's interpretation of the two verses, see Alexandre, “L'Exégèse,” 161–182.

- 73 Gilles Dorival et al., *La Bible grecque des Septante: Du judaïsme hellénistique au christianisme ancien*, ICA (Paris: Cerf and CNRS, 1994). Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G.E. Watson (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2000), 47–50. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament*, 69–79, 90–96.

culated mainly in Hellenised Jewish communities.⁷⁴ It is not known whether Gregory read these sources directly or from Origen's *Hexapla*. Nor do we know why did he compare the available versions of the text. He did not explain his reasons for doing so. One might suppose that he felt the need to overcome the difficulties of the passage and its peculiar phraseology. Later in the treatise he refers to the "misuse of the divine words in the scriptural practice,"⁷⁵ namely, by the Septuagint translation. Here, Gregory appears to follow Basil who referred to the Syriac version of Gen 1:2, as discussed in Chapter Five above. He may have resolved that one translation did not suffice to grasp the message. Regardless of his reasons, at this juncture *Apology* alternates the Septuagint and Aquila's version for the elucidation of the beginning of the narrative, "Moses' lofty word."⁷⁶ Gregory actually shows a preference for Aquila's rendition ἐν κεφαλαίῳ ("in general" or "in summary") to Septuagint's ἐν ἀρχῇ ("in the beginning").⁷⁷ Nevertheless, he admits that the two phrases are synonymous⁷⁸ (both denoting that everything was made by God).⁷⁹ As he failed to disclose the rationale behind his choice, I would suggest that it concerns the topic of creation as a single event and multiple events.⁸⁰ I return to this topic in the second half of this chapter.

Gregory's analysis of the chaos metaphor from the second verse of Genesis is even more remarkable. In this case he quotes all four translations mentioned above, pointing out that where the Septuagint reads ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκευαστος ("invisible and unstructured")⁸¹ the other versions propose very different solutions. According to him,⁸² Symmachus gives ἀργὸν καὶ ἀδιάκριτον ("fruitless and unspecified"),⁸³ Theodotion renders the phrase as κένωμα καὶ οὐθέν ("deserted and nothing"), and finally Aquila reduces everything to θέν καὶ οὐθέν

74 See Sébastien Morlet, "L'utilisation des révisions de la Septante dans la première littérature chrétienne: Philologie, exégèse et polémique," in *La Bible juive dans l'Antiquité*, ed. Rémi Gounelle and Jan Joosten, HTB 9 (Lausanne: Éditions du Zèbre, 2014), 117–140. Pentiu, *The Old Testament*, 79–81.

75 τὴν κατὰχρησιν τῶν θείων ῥημάτων ἐπὶ τῆς γραφικῆς συνηθείας (*Apology* 44.57.2–3).

76 *Apology* 8.16.13–14.

77 *Apology* 8.16.14–17.1. See Alexandre, *Le Commencement du Livre*, 67, 71 and Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 425–426.

78 *Apology* 8.17.13–14. Lit. "One is the meaning of the two words, namely, beginning and summary."

79 *Apology* 8.17.6–13.

80 See on this, briefly, Blowers, "Beauty," 15.

81 Quoted in *Apology* 16.27.10. For the significance Gregory ascribes to these words, see Alexandre, "L'Exégèse," 172–173.

82 *Apology* 17.28.12–15.

83 See Alexandre, "L'Exégèse," 173–174.

("utter nothingness").⁸⁴ His quotations do not entirely correspond to Origen's *Hexapla*, which for Aquila gives κένωμα καὶ οὐθέν while for Theodotion κενὸν καὶ οὐθέν with the variant οὐθέν καὶ οὐθέν.⁸⁵ These differences might indicate that Gregory is quoting from memory. Several lines later, he confesses his dislike for the phrase οὐθέν καὶ οὐθέν, which, apart from echoing Epicurean nihilism (in fact the famous polarity of Democritus, δέν–μηδέν, playing with the notions of body and nothingness),⁸⁶ seems to him logically untenable.⁸⁷ His interest in these nuances notwithstanding, never again does he repeat this exercise in *Apology*. From this point onwards he pays increasingly less attention to the scriptural narrative. It appears that he uses Genesis as a launching pad for introducing a scientific discourse on nature.

When he briefly turns to Peter's query about why the narrative of creation mentions the luminaries in the fourth day (while their role had become obvious far earlier, in the succession of evenings and mornings),⁸⁸ it is only after lengthy descriptions of various natural phenomena⁸⁹ in accordance with the views of the naturalists of that age, the *physiologoi*.⁹⁰ Drobner identified twenty-two scientific sources Gregory appears to have consulted, as a backdrop against which his natural theory should be assessed.⁹¹ The evidence of these scientific sources confirms the current consensus on his erudition.⁹²

84 For Aquila's version PG 44, 80B gives οὐθέν καὶ οὐθέν.

85 *Origenis Hexaplorum*, 1:7. See Alexandre, "L'Exégèse," 169–170 and *Le Commencement du Livre*, 76–77, 79. For an overview of Origen's *Hexapla*, see Pentiuc, *The Old Testament*, 82–84.

86 For the interplay between "something" and "nothing" in Democritus, see Björn Freter, "Democritus on Being and Ought: Some remarks on the existential side of early Greek Atomism," *Akropolis* 2 (2018): 67–84, esp. 68–69.

87 ἀθεώρητον (lit. "unintelligible"; *Apology* 17.29.12–13). See Alexandre, "L'Exégèse," 170.

88 *Apology* 64.71.19–21.

89 *Apology* 27.40.16–63, 71.18.

90 See his reference to the "sages" (σοφοί) who "philosophised about nature" (φυσιολογοῦσιν) in *Apology* 37.50.9–10.

91 Adam Cooper, to whom I am grateful for this observation, brought to my attention that Simplicius, twice mentioned in Drobner's edition, at 25.7 and 29.12–17, was a sixth century author. Gregory could not have consulted his works.

92 Bodogae, "Introducere," 9–10. Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 53–54. Corsini, "Nouvelles Perspectives," 95, 101–103. Jean Daniélou, "Grégoire de Nysse et la philosophie," in *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, 3–17. Laplace, "Introduction," 19–35. Morwenna Ludlow, "Science and Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Anima et Resurrectione*: Astronomy and Automata," *JTS* 60:2 (2009): 467–489. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 5–6. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 22–39. Simonetti, "Exegesis," 332–333. Stramara, "Surveying the Heavens," 153–155. Susan Wessel, "The Reception of Greek Science in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*," *VC* 63 (2009): 24–46.

Interestingly, however, he does not simply add scientific information to an otherwise theological narrative about the universe. Although he voices his reverence for the inspired character of Genesis,⁹³ he relies on the available sciences⁹⁴ to correct what he believes are inconsistencies in the scriptural account. By not observing the physical progression of creation as the scientific culture of the time outlined it, Genesis is not cosmographically accurate. For example, Gregory finds an unwarranted break within the narrative, which does not address the air immediately after light and fire.⁹⁵ He forgot that the scriptural account does not mention fire at all and that—being a Semitic narrative—it ignores such Greek doctrines as the four elements and the material qualities.⁹⁶ Either way, here, Gregory emulates Basil again, who believed that Genesis—not containing a complete cosmology—invites the inquisitive mind to fill in the blanks through research.⁹⁷ He does the same, crediting the available sciences with the task of supplying an accurate description of reality. His rehearsal of the method is nevertheless original. Basil maintained moderation as to what a reader can infer from the pointers within the narrative. In turn, *Apology* shows Gregory at pains to exemplify how that actually works. The result is a midrash of sorts, a scientific elucidation of the scriptural teaching on the making of the cosmos.

Against this backdrop, *Apology* was meant as a cosmological complement to the anthropology of *Constitution*, not as an exegesis of the scriptural narrative. The anthropological treatise displays a similar reliance on scientific information—mainly anatomical, biological, and medical in nature—for which reason can hardly be considered an exegetical work. It is likely that by way of these writings Gregory, again in Basil's footsteps, aimed at transposing the teaching of Genesis from its Semitic setting into the Hellenistic categories of late antiquity. This task was only partially fulfilled by the four Greek translations of Genesis mentioned above. By evincing the same ancient Near and Middle Eastern cosmography and physics, these translations made the doc-

93 *Apology* 1.6.1; 2.8.1. Bouteneff (*Beginnings*, 154–155) discovered a sample of respectful attitude toward Genesis elsewhere.

94 His reliance on the sciences is not blind however. True, in *Apology* 1.5.1–6.9 he declares unwillingness to address the contradictory explanations of natural phenomena available at the time. Bouteneff (*Beginnings*, 155) identified a similar claim in *Catechetical Oration*. But the often polemical discourse of *Apology* tells a very different story.

95 *Apology* 24.37.11–38.10 etc. For the identification of light and fire in Gregory, see Blowers, *Drama*, 120. In this light, I beg to disagree with Köckert's (*Christliche Kosmologie*, 406–407) view that Gregory only strives to prove the accord of Genesis and the available sciences.

96 For the latter, see *Apology* 7.16.4–11.

97 *Hexaemeron* 2.3.14–19.

trine of creation barely accessible. Taking once more his cue from Basil, Gregory tacitly proceeded to a new cultural contextualisation of Genesis within the framework of Hellenistic science.⁹⁸ His rich scientific elaborations must have met the scholarly criteria of his demanding readership, foremost the interests of his brother, Peter, providing them with a profound understanding of Genesis within the context of the available sciences.

On this note, I return to my proposal that the method at work in the treatise belongs to apologetics.

1.3 *Method and Genre*

A way of determining the method and the genre of *Apology* is by probing Gregory's interests. He does not leave the reader without clues. One such clue consists in his references to the creator of the universe. Quite early within his exposition he evokes God's "will, wisdom, and power"⁹⁹ as the theological lens through which to look at reality. He returns to this stance on a number of occasions,¹⁰⁰ but not consistently. These recurring statements about the divine factor fulfil, by all accounts, a hermeneutical function, but not for the scriptural narrative itself. No, Gregory deploys Genesis as a tool for interpreting the cosmos described by the available sciences in a theological perspective. His approach is reminiscent of Clement's, discussed in Chapter Three, above. A few pages after the initial reference to the divine activity, he declares his views on the matter. In his words,

The prophet wrote the Book of Genesis (τὸ τῆς γενέσεως βιβλίον) as an introduction to divine knowledge (εἰσαγωγικὸν πρὸς θεογνωσίαν). Thus, when through visionary knowledge (ἡ διὰ τῆς ὀψευς γνῶσις) he divided

98 Nicolaidis, *Science and Orthodoxy*, 9–11.

99 τὸ θέλημα, τὴν σοφίαν, τὴν δύναμιν (*Apology* 7.14.13–15.8). For Gregory's reference to the divine "will, wisdom, and power," see Torstein Tollefsen, "Cosmology," in *BDGN*, 175–179, esp. 176–177. The phrase corresponds to Gregory's view of God's creative will in *On the Soul and Resurrection*. See Bradshaw, "Plato in the Cappadocians," 207 and Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 411–413. The three terms, "will, wisdom, and power," seem to refer to God's ongoing providential activity, not only the original creation. Possibly, Theodore of Mopsuestia borrowed from Gregory the understanding of wisdom as providence. For other sources of Theodore's understanding and his own view of providence, see Svetoslav Ribolov, "'Wisdom of God' in Theodore of Mopsuestia's Theology," in *Sophia: The Wisdom of God—Die Weisheit Gottes*, ed. Theresia Hainthaler et al., PO 40 / WPT 7 (Innsbruck and Wien: Tyrolia Verlag, 2017), 181–202.

100 *Apology* 9.19.6–15; 25.37.11–14; 64.71.21–72.15; 65.72.18–73.1; 69.75.19–76.12. For the divine will as sourcing the creation, see Daniélou, "Grégoire de Nysse," 15 and Köckert, "The Seed," 27.

for us the heaven and the earth, the intention of Moses was to lead those enslaved by the senses through things visible (διὰ τῶν φαινομένων) to the things that transcend the scope of the senses (πρὸς τὰ ὑπερκείμενα τῆς αἰσθητικῆς καταλήψεως).¹⁰¹

This excerpt displays Platonic overtones, transparent through the epistemic schema that proceeds from the visible (διὰ τῶν φαινομένων) to the invisible (πρὸς τὰ ὑπερκείμενα τῆς αἰσθητικῆς καταλήψεως). We encountered identical approaches in Origen.¹⁰² Gregory's text also evokes two passages from Basil's *Hexaemeron*¹⁰³ on the cosmos as a school for souls. In the footsteps of his older brother, he considers the creation through the scriptural lens (τὸ τῆς γενέσεως βιβλίον) by which he unveils the world's theological and spiritual meaningfulness.¹⁰⁴ But by mentioning the introductory role of Genesis (εἰσαγωγικὸν πρὸς θεογνωσίαν) for the epoptic or visionary knowledge (ἡ διὰ τῆς ὀψεως γνῶσις) this approach also echoes Clement,¹⁰⁵ who examined the creation narrative as a preparation for theology. Gregory seems to have adjusted the methods of Basil, Clement, and Origen to his own purposes, devising *Apology* as a way to show in what ways can Genesis contribute to a theological contemplation of reality. Against this backdrop, *Apology* is neither about exegesis nor about theological contents; it is about learning how to reach such contents.

If my reading is correct, his avoiding Peter's scriptural queries appears in a new light. It is not the creation narrative which is in question here and so the exegetical scantiness of the treatise should not come as a surprise. In question is nature itself. Nature, incidentally, is the object of Peter's curiosity. It is in order to understand nature that Gregory examines the cosmos so meticulously from the combined viewpoint of the available sciences and the theology of creation.¹⁰⁶ The latter transpires through the allusion to the scriptural narrative—by evoking Moses, its presumed author—as instrumental for revealing meaningful pointers within nature. After all, Moses wrote Genesis as an “introduction to divine knowledge,” showing that the reality's visible side

101 *Apology* 8.17.2–7. Cf. *Apology* 4.10.9–13; 13.23.19–24.10. Köckert (“The Seed”) referred to chapters 5, 8, and 64. Bradshaw (“Plato in the Cappadocians,” 200–201) identified a similar position in Gregory's *On Virginity*.

102 *Principles* 1.8.2.36–37; *Song* 3.209.22–210.4; 3.211.23–212.3; 3.212.12–13; 3.220.10–11, 24–25. See on this, briefly, Elm, “Dressing Moses,” 55.

103 *Hexaemeron* 1.6.11.

104 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 408–409. Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 135.

105 *Exhortation* 8.77–81; *Stromateis* 4.1.3.2.

106 His approach anticipates John Philoponus'. See Mueller-Jourdain, “La question de l'âme,” 138–139.

points to the invisible.¹⁰⁷ So guided, the seekers of truth are able to decipher the message embedded in nature. Daniel Stramara explains how this works in *Constitution* and elsewhere:

God's creation reveals theological principles at work. The laws of nature reflect the laws of God. The study of nature leads to a greater appreciation for the Divine Nature.¹⁰⁸

Stramara's findings corroborate my own. His "laws of God" coincide with the scriptural revelation from the passage quoted above.

Perceived through the eyes of faith guided by scriptural wisdom the cosmos is theologically meaningful, a divine symbol, even a theophany. Such were indeed Gregory's eyes. As Silvas beautifully noted, "to him the whole world was a tissue of metaphors leading upward to transcendent realities."¹⁰⁹ The same holds true about his anagogic interpretation, elsewhere, of the burning bush episode from the viewpoint of Paul's experience.¹¹⁰ The difference between this case and the passage from *Apology* 8.17.2–7 is that while Gregory reconstructs the theophany of the burning bush from the vantage point of another scriptural episode, in the above passage he elucidates the world as theophany through the lens of a scriptural narrative. Through this lens, similarly, *Apology* depicts the universe as pointing to God in anagogic fashion.¹¹¹ In so doing, the treatise relates to Basil's *Hexaemeron* more than Gregory admits. Both works depict a theologically meaningful cosmos.

Apart from the anagogic dimension, typical for the tradition of spiritual exegesis, by taking this position Gregory works within the parameters of the apologetic literature. His method perfectly matches the apologetic discourse of the authors discussed in Chapters Two and Five. Corsini reached the same conclusion in a different manner, namely, by arguing that *Apology* refutes the

107 *Apology* 8.17.2–3. This understanding corresponds to Basil's in *Hexaemeron* 1.1.6–18.

108 Stramara, "Surveying the Heavens," 155. For a similar conclusion in regard to *Apology*, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 407. For more on Gregory's natural contemplation, see Foltz, *Noetics of Nature*, 166–167.

109 Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 67.

110 See Richard A. Zaleski, "Moses's Damascus Road Theophany: Rewriting Scripture in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*," *J ECS* 26:2 (2018): 249–274. For the complexity of Gregory's interpretation of the burning bush, see Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Scripture Re-envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible*, BAC 13 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 94–99.

111 Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 127–128.

Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis*.¹¹² Refutation of philosophical or scientific theories is the province of Christian apologetics. While *ekpyrosis* may not be the target of the entire treatise, Corsini's observation corroborates my assessment that the treatise belongs with the apologetic genre. Likewise consistent with the apologetic discourse is Gregory's undertaking to harmonise—as Juan Antonio Gil-Tamayo noticed—the creation narrative and scientific cosmology.¹¹³ To that end, Gregory introduced the Book of Genesis as a worthwhile contributor within a highly competitive market of ideas about the universe. And although he stated that he was not interested in reconciling the contradictory opinions that were put forward,¹¹⁴ it is obvious that he attempted to bridge various representations of reality.

At this juncture I must briefly return to the reasons that must have determined him to discuss the universe and natural phenomena from a combined angle that favoured scientific information. I have shown above that he endeavoured to assert himself as a scholar able to meet the expectations of an educated readership. As such, he had to deploy the tools that impressed his audiences, in this case the available scientific information. But another, not unrelated, reason may be discerned, having precisely to do with the apologetic nature of the treatise. It is beyond doubt that Gregory wrote it remembering the meteoric reign of Julian the Apostate and the revival of pagan culture it occasioned. The earlier pagan claims about the supposed inaptitude of Christians for philosophy, science, and literature returned in force during Julian's rule. Gregory is not the only Christian intellectual who reacted against these claims.¹¹⁵ To that end, his namesake, Gregory the Theologian, had proceeded to rewrite his own works according to the classical canons. The elegance of Basil's *Address*, his *Hexaemeron*, and the correspondence with Libanius attest to the same purposes. We have seen in Chapter Two that *Gentiles*, Athanasius' apologetic treatise, has the same scope. Against this backdrop, Gregory likely designed *Apology* to prove that he—a homeschooled Christian bishop—was perfectly well equipped to engage the scientific theories of the time. His extensive knowledge must have impressed both the hesitant believers in the church and his pagan critics. So understood, his excesses—particularly the amount of

112 Corsini, "Nouvelles Perspectives," 97, 102–103.

113 Gil-Tamayo, "HEX," 387.

114 *Apology* 14.6–8. His position corresponds to Basil's in *Hexaemeron* 1.2.5–12; 3.3.3–16.

115 Brian E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, ECF (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 26–34. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 7, 40, 111, 115–116, 124–125. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 12–17, 79, 170–171. Frances Young, "Classical genres in Christian guise; Christian genres in classical guise," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 251–258, esp. 251–252.

scientific information included in the treatise—appear in a better light. And although this positive nuance does not take away from my points concerning his personal agenda, it may have justified his approach in the eyes of his contemporaries. Given the lack of clarity within *Apology*, the issue remains undecidable. What matters is that, corresponding to Gregory's various motivations, the method at work within the treatise displays all the hallmarks of the apologetic genre.

Before moving on to matters of worldview, a last word is in order about the relation between the exegetical claim of *Apology* and its content. There is a noticeable incongruity between the content—with its endless scientific explanations—and the work's opening and closing chapters. These refer to matters of scriptural interpretation¹¹⁶ and “the proper meaning”¹¹⁷ of Genesis. We already know that here Gregory was not interested in exegesis, but wished instead to bridge the scriptural worldview and the scientific culture of his age. What then could “proper meaning” itself mean for him? I believe that the answer lies with his way of managing Genesis and science, earlier discussed. First, he resolved to let the narrative shed light upon the scientific description of nature in order to reveal cosmic meaningfulness. The example of Moses “dividing” the universe in order to direct people's attention to things on high illustrates this approach.¹¹⁸ Second, by incorporating scientific data into his theological vision, he rendered Genesis intelligible to its Christian Hellenist readers. The substitution of fire for light is the best illustration of this approach.¹¹⁹ Considering together these two ways of managing matters, the “proper meaning” of the words is not Scripture's literal sense. It is the new, Hellenistic contextualisation of the biblical message. Said otherwise, the “proper meaning” refers to what Genesis looks like when rewritten in the cultural categories of his contemporaries. This understanding differs from Köckert's significantly.¹²⁰

We have seen above that *Apology* is not about defending and continuing Basil's *Hexaemeron*, and that Gregory pursued his own goals. He never disclosed these goals directly. Nevertheless, he showed an interest, attributed to the addressee of the treatise, in the order of the cosmos and in the logical arrangement of the creation narrative. We have also learnt that his reasons were of a personal as well as a contextual nature. In regards to personal rea-

116 *Apology* 1.6.4–6; 3.8.12–9.9; 5.11.3–8.

117 ἐπὶ τῆς ἰδίας ἐμφάσεως (*Apology* 77.83.14).

118 *Apology* 8.17.2–7.

119 *Apology* 24.37.11–38.10.

120 See Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 407–408.

sons, *Apology* was meant to demonstrate his scholarship, indisputable beyond the treatise's odd lack of structure. His lengthy scientific arguments and the critique of Basil's position made clear that he was a thinker in his own right. The contextual reasons behind his approach refer to the chosen genre and historical situation. The genre of the treatise is clearly apologetic, not exegetical. Gregory scored high in terms of reacting to the resurgence of pagan culture. His erudition must have impressed his readers, convincing the hesitant within the church and perhaps proving to the cultural elite that Christianity is not a religion for fools. Equally significant within this context is his deployment of the creation narrative and parallel scriptural texts as lenses through which to consider the cosmos in a Christian sense. That is not all however: *Apology* is an odd apologetic treatise. The scientific information included in it satisfies the apologetic genre. But the treatise diverges from the norm by its very thin theology and the absence of spiritual dimension. I would propose that the cause of this situation is that Gregory emulated the heuristic approach of Basil, a matter to which I shall return.

2 Gregory's Christian Worldview

Contemporary scholars have often remarked the openness of the Cappadocian theologians towards the sciences.¹²¹ Gregory's *Apology* perfectly illustrates this consensus. Scientific naturalism is explicit in it, outshining all other aspects of the discourse. In what follows I consider more closely the scientific dimension of this "technical treatise" on the creation (to use the category of Blowers).¹²²

The intention of Gregory to pursue a scientific discourse appears in *Apology* from the outset. Already in the prologue he mentions that Moses "philosophised on matters of cosmogony."¹²³ The statement—a counterpoint for the sages who philosophised about nature,¹²⁴ whom we encountered earlier—bears a specialised sense. It excludes superfluous speculative exercises and fruitless sophistic oratory. For the ancients, including Gregory and before him

121 Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 36, 40, 43. Karamanolis and Schwartz, "Basil of Caesarea," 189–190. George Karamanolis and Daniel L. Schwartz, "Gregory of Nazianzos (ca 370–389 CE)" and "Gregory of Nyssa (Nyssa) (ca 370–ca 395 CE)," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Natural Scientists*, 351–352. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 100, 105, 289. Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 137–140.

122 Blowers, *Drama*, 109.

123 ἐν τῇ κοσμογονεῖα φιλοσοφηθέντων (*Apology* 1.6.2).

124 φυσιολογούσιν οἱ σοφοί (*Apology* 37.50.9–10).

Clement, philosophy and science were inseparable.¹²⁵ To philosophise amounted to acquiring rigorous knowledge. To philosophise on cosmogony was a matter of enquiring scientifically about the origins and the nature of the cosmos. And although he evoked the example of Moses and his own brother's queries, Gregory himself was interested in the universe. The extent to which he explored natural phenomena leaves no room for doubting it. Alexandre rightly observed that Gregory produced "une vision systématique du monde, de sa création, de son ordonnancement, de sa permanence."¹²⁶ In other words, he worked out a Christian worldview built upon ancient naturalism.

Noteworthy is that Gregory harmonised ancient naturalism with the theological framework of the narrative of creation. Emulating Athanasius' *Gentiles*, the Basilian method in *Hexaemeron*, and the interests of his namesake, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory's naturalism was by no means unique within the Christian literature of his age. Similar preferences pervade the anthropological treatise of a younger contemporary, Nemesius of Emesa (of whose biography nothing is known),¹²⁷ the eclectic compendium of Christian science known as *Physiologos*,¹²⁸ and almost two centuries later, John Philoponus' (d. 570) *On the Creation of the World*.¹²⁹ Unprecedented however are the amount of scientific information Gregory included in *Apology* and his "remarkable power of natural description," as Wallace-Hadrill called it.¹³⁰ Jean Laplace was right to observe that given the length and rigour of his natural discourse, had he lived today Gregory would have joined the scientific world rather than the company of philosophers.¹³¹ In this light, Charles Kannengiesser's assessment, that the works of Gregory on the creation are poorer than Basil's in relation to "the apologetic study of the material world,"¹³² come as a surprise.

Of further note is that Gregory's naturalism—corresponding to his early Christian peers discussed in the foregoing—refers to a richer concept of nature,

125 Daniélou, "Grégoire de Nysse," 16–17. Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 4.

126 Alexandre, "L'Exégèse," 159.

127 William Telfer (ed.), *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, LCC (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 206–211. Arnaud Zucker, "Nemesios of Emesa (ca 360–430 CE)," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Natural Scientists*, 570–571.

128 Arnaud Zucker, "Physiologos (100–400 CE)," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Natural Scientists*, 665–666.

129 Mueller-Jourdain, "La question de l'âme," 139–142.

130 Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 3.

131 Laplace, "Introduction," 11. Cf. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 5–6 and Wessel, "Reception of Greek Science," 40–41.

132 Kannengiesser, *Handbook*, 753. For a contrary view, see Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 52–53; *Gregory of Nyssa*, 3, 5–6.

irreducible to its modern, reductionist versions. I shall return to this topic in due course. For now suffice it to point out that—while modern naturalism excludes all divine involvement—Gregory’s naturalism affirms God’s active presence within the creation. In perfect accord with Basil, he represents nature as a dynamic and interactive event, an open field where divine and cosmic energies converge.¹³³ His theory of matter, discussed below, exemplifies this understanding.

In what follows I examine certain difficulties about Gregory’s cosmological synthesis, to then turn to a couple of his contributions.

2.1 *Cosmological Difficulties and Heuristic Pedagogy*

It is not easy to organise the relevant material within *Apology* into a consistent account. One difficulty, already mentioned, is the unsystematic character of the treatise itself. But this is not the only issue. Sometimes the discourse deliberately throws up problems, especially in parts where—instead of laying out a structured teaching, as Peter requested—Gregory offers challenging propositions, conundrums, and open questions. Here is one example.

After spelling out his younger brother’s interest in the origin of the heaven and the earth, he states enigmatically that “while the light awaited the divine command, darkness was there without a command” from God.¹³⁴ The statement is perplexing and might be taken to suggest that darkness stands for an uncreated preexistent chaos. Such a misunderstanding would not be singular. Similarly, Harry Wolfson proposed that Gregory’s equally enigmatic contention, about creation “out of God” (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), means that creation and emanation are one thing.¹³⁵ Richard Sorabji¹³⁶ noted however that Wolfson’s reading of the phrase “out of God” relied on Eriugena’s identification of nothingness with God, not on Gregory’s own discourse.¹³⁷ Torstein Tollefsen clarified the matter by pointing out that the phrases “out of God” and “out of

133 An illustration of this principle can be found in *Apology* 65.72.18–20. On Basil’s application of this principle, see Chapter Five above. See also Foltz, *Noetics of Nature*, 208, about the shared Cappadocian sense of God operating from within the creation.

134 τὸ μὲν φῶς ἀναμένει τὸ θεῖον πρόσταγμα, τὸ δὲ σκότος καὶ ἄνευ προστάγματος ἦν (*Apology* 5.11.8–10).

135 Harry A. Wolfson, “The Identification of *Ex Nihilo* with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa,” *HTR* 63 (1970): 53–60, esp. 55, 58. The phrase in question, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, is found in *Constitution* 23.

136 Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 294 n. 30. See also Blowers, *Drama*, 179–181, for the relevant literature.

137 Wolfson, “The Identification of *Ex Nihilo*,” 59.

nothing” denote different stages of creation. Thus, “out of God” refers to the antecedent divine thoughts about the universe—the blueprint discussed in Chapters Two and Three—whereas the phrase “out of nothing” signifies the physical beginning of the universe.¹³⁸ We encountered this distinction, though differently phrased, in Origen,¹³⁹ and, as we have seen on that occasion, it is not unique to these two authors. I therefore concur with Tollefsen’s solution; I will return to the significance of this distinction shortly. What matters at this juncture is that it is highly improbable that someone, like Gregory, who preached the utter ontological difference between the created cosmos and the uncreated God,¹⁴⁰ would confuse creation and emanation. To take the “darkness deprived of divine command” as meaning an uncreated chaos would be equally unwarranted. But in order to decode this phrase I must turn to his complex notion of chaos.

In the analysis of Gen 1:2, earlier discussed, Gregory presents chaos as a wisp of undifferentiated matter, as emptiness and barrenness.¹⁴¹ Basil was of the same view.¹⁴² The infertile, dark chaos was unable to cooperate (συνεργεῖν) with God in order to be transformed into light. For the purposes of becoming active, it needed a divine nudge.¹⁴³ This understanding is consistent with the point that divine “wisdom, will, and power” profoundly condition the creation,¹⁴⁴ corresponding to Basil’s Logos running through creation.¹⁴⁵ The divine nudge—“radiating through the darkness and flow of nature”—came as light.¹⁴⁶ God’s light brightened the darkness and reconfigured it into light. Against this backdrop, the primordial light in Genesis was a divinely infused natural energy that made the chaos active and fertile, enabling it to synergise with the creator. The chaos changed into the light that traversed it. It follows that the “darkness deprived of divine command” does not mean an uncreated chaos. It refers to the inherent motionlessness and barrenness of the chaos left by itself.

The reader stumbles here on another difficulty. Insofar as the chaos is itself God’s creation and divinely conditioned, its barrenness seems unthinkable. Gregory’s exegetical engagement of Gen 1:2 already makes clear that the idea of

138 Tollefsen, “Cosmology,” 175–176.

139 *Principles* 3.5.1.9–14; *Song* 3.210.20–22.

140 Scot Douglass, “Diastêma,” 227–228. Mateo-Seco, “Creation,” 185–186.

141 *Apology* 17.28.12–15.

142 *Hexaemeron* 5.2.29–35; 8.1.1–19.

143 *Apology* 16.27.8.

144 *Apology* 64.71.21–72.15; 65.72.18–73.1; 69.75.19–76.12.

145 *Hexaemeron* 9.2.1–4, 18–22.

146 προεφάνη ἐν τῷ κούφῳ καὶ εὐκινῆτι τῆς φύσεως (*Apology* 65.72.20–22).

a completely infertile chaos is abhorrent.¹⁴⁷ He even intimates elsewhere that all created beings are made for the use of other beings.¹⁴⁸ The original chaos therefore had to be fertile and serviceable, and it was not. The impasse is obvious. The possibility of an authorial oversight regarding this contradiction is not entirely out of the question. This difficulty might denote however a deliberate paradox, perhaps with the intention of building a hypothetical case. If this were so, darkness and infertility are a metaphor for the creation's dependence upon the creator. The perception of Gregory overlaps with the view of his traditional predecessors (discussed in Chapters Two, Four, and Five above) that the universe is in permanent need of divine support. Either way, ultimately the chaos was not useless. It was the stuff which at God's nudge or command became active, light, the ordered universe, diversified in the multiplicity of things created. What was barren became the prodigious source and cradle of everything that is. It became everything that is through the purposefulness and ongoing advancement of the successive orders of being discussed in Chapter Seven below. Here, Gregory's speculative representation foreshadows the theory of cold dark matter of contemporary cosmology. This theory postulates a hierarchical, upwards emergence of cosmic complexity.¹⁴⁹

Whether or not Gregory's chaos theory quite fits the bill of contemporary cold dark matter, his hypothetical case clarifies the meaning of the statement that light awaited the divine command (τὸ θεῖον πρόσταγμα) while darkness was deprived of command (ἄνευ προστάγματος). Darkness and light are the two sides of one coin. Extrapolating the solution of Tollefsen for the physical creation, the statement envisages two stages in the organisation of matter after its creation. During the first stage, unorganised matter remained in a chaotic state and by itself it would have stayed so, dark, latent, and infertile. In the second stage, God's permeating energy activates the potentiality of the chaos, together generating light, and with it, being and order, through the ages. Gregory's transformation of darkness into light upon the divine command corresponds to what Basil and John Chrysostom identified behind the metaphors of Gen 1:2, namely, a synergetic event.¹⁵⁰ Following Basil, for him the synergy between divine and natural forces is not a singular occurrence—it remains the norm

147 *Apology* 17.29.12–13.

148 *Constitution* 8.144.36–49.

149 I am grateful to Simon Litchfield for suggesting the analogy of cold dark matter for Gregory's chaos. Details about this theory are readily available. Michael L. Balogh et al., "Testing Cold Dark Matter with the Hierarchical Build-Up of Stellar Light," *MNRAS* 385:2 (2008): 1003–1014. Scott Donelson et al., "Cold Dark Matter," *Science* 274:5284 (1996): 69–75.

150 Basil, *Hexameron* 2.3.38–42; 2.6.20–22; 5.2.29–35; 8.1.1–19. John Chrysostom, *Genesis* 3.1. One researcher reduced Gregory's articulation of the principle of synergy to the natural

throughout the universe's expansion.¹⁵¹ This solution implicitly relates to Gregory's view of creation as a single event and multiple events, which I address in the next section: the initial synergetic event precipitated a cascading series of similar events.

The statement on darkness and light links well with the phrases earlier discussed, "out of God" and "out of nothing." In an attempt to organise Gregory's discourse, I would propose that the relevant passages refer to a succession of moments in the prehistory of the universe. (If everything that occurs after the Big Bang is the object of Big History, then the moments discussed here are pre-historic.) While "out of God" designates the antecedent divine plan of creation, "out of nothing" encapsulates the creation of matter. The latter was initially in a dark, latent, and chaotic state, after which follows the activation of its potentialities in the form of light or order. So pieced together, Gregory's enigmatic assertions refer to stages within processes of creating and arraying, instantiating and ordering.¹⁵² But the readers stumble here upon another difficulty: Gregory denies any conceptual difference between to create and to array the universe.¹⁵³ As with the previous difficulties, he does not seem to notice the inconsistency and *Apology* does not contain a direct solution to this puzzle. The solution for this inconsistency could be, again, to treat the matter from the viewpoint of the topic of creation as a single event and multiple events. This topic, indeed, builds upon the distinction between instantiating and ordering. Anticipating my treatment of this topic, I would suggest that, to sort out the relation of darkness and light without contradicting Gregory's doctrine of creation, the readers should bypass his statement about the conceptual synonymy of to create and to array.

But there is yet another way of looking at this situation. This other angle requires to admit that Gregory left the matter undecided on purpose. Let me

generative capabilities of the cosmos. See Elena Ene D-Vasilescu, "Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Early Christian World* (2017), 1072–1086, esp. 1078.

151 *Apology* 65.72.18–22. See also Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 459–460. Blowers (*Drama*, 220) discovered elsewhere a related term, "breathing together" (σύνπνοια), which perfectly describes the situation: the created and the uncreated interact on a fundamental level and on an ongoing basis. The idea of a cosmos that breathes is ancient. See Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, 80.

152 For the emergence of the fundamental elements from the primordial chaos, see Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 446–454.

153 Τὸ γὰρ κατασκευάσαι, καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι, οὐδὲν δοκεῖ διαφέρειν κατὰ τὴν ἔννοιαν ("for reasoning, to array and to create do not seem to differ in any way"; *Apology* 5.11.15). Reasoning, ἔννοια, indicates an epistemological approach, to which I return a little later. For more about Gregory's related notion of ἐπίνοια (reasoning, thought, reflection), see David Bradshaw, "Essence and Energies: What Kind of Distinction?" *Analogia* 6 (2019): 5–35, esp. 12–13.

explain. Since the statement about darkness and light supposedly answered Peter's quest for clarity on the creation of heaven and earth, the addressee must have been startled as much as anyone else. Gregory's answer is not plain, it is a conundrum. The situation has a distinctly Basilian ring. We discovered in Chapter Five that Basil employed the *disciplina arcani* to stir wonder, enquiry, contemplation, and doxology in his readers. His approach illustrates the heuristic pedagogy of the classical age, at least from Socrates onwards. Gregory emulates Basil's example. First, he outlines more difficulties than Peter originally spotted and dismisses as trivial some of his questions. Second, by not providing his brother with clear answers, he means to sharpen his mind, to train his thinking. This pedagogy—we have seen in Chapters Three, Four, and Five—does not offer definitive and straightforward answers. Instead, it sets a framework and fosters certain skills, training the readers in order to continue the quest for knowledge. That this is Gregory's pedagogical strategy becomes apparent at the end of the prologue, in a warning that *Apology* is about "exercising intellectually" (ἐγγυμνάζω) and that it does not provide an "exegetical teaching" (διδασκαλία ἐξηγητική)¹⁵⁴ or normative solutions.

His disciple, Evagrius Ponticus, indirectly corroborates my view of this matter. We already know, from Chapter Four, that Evagrius ascribed to "Gregory the righteous" the habit of teaching his advanced students through obscure statements, which encouraged them to enquire and reflect. Only simple folk received clear instructions, for immediate edification.¹⁵⁵ Gregory's brother, Peter, might have therefore received the treatment of an advanced student. Of course, there is no way of knowing Peter's reaction to his brother's training methods. One would hope that he learnt the lesson as any diligent student of his times would do, by appropriating the analytical tools which he received in order to pursue his search. Either way, given Gregory's devotion for Origen—who, as we found out in Chapter Three, was a master pedagogue in the classical sense—the presence of heuristic protocols, here, should not come as a surprise. If my interpretation holds, then we might be given an opportunity here of sorting out another issue, namely, *Apology's* meagre theological substance. By not supplying developed theological answers, Gregory must have encouraged Peter to draw his own conclusions from the available data. In the light of these heuristic protocols, moreover, *Apology* should not be treated like a scientific textbook of our time.

¹⁵⁴ *Apology* 6.13.20–14.2.

¹⁵⁵ Evagrius, *The Gnostic* 44.9–13.

I cannot conclude this discussion before pointing out that, apart from his veiled solutions and the launching of intellectual challenges, Gregory did disclose important elements of his method, such as his selective approach to the topics. This approach transpires through his encouraging Peter to study certain things and his discouraging him from researching other things. The first category includes the origin of the universe in God's "will, wisdom, and power."¹⁵⁶ Peter's own research had to complement the theological thinness of the treatise. The second category refers to topics such as the inconsistency of cause and effect in the manner in which the immaterial God created a material universe, spirit and matter, and how reality's visible dimension emerged from the invisible.¹⁵⁷ This distinction between topics worth pursuing and topics not worth pursuing indicates that although on the whole *Apology* is meant as a heuristic device for an advanced learner, Peter still needed basic guidance. If my intuition is correct, then what we read in the treatise is not everything that Gregory could have said—nor his best—but a teaching that at once instructed and enticed Peter to redouble his investigative skills and efforts. And since Gregory handled scientific data according to the criteria of spiritual guidance, *Apology* is an important witness to a long-forgotten tradition of learning for which—as Harrison pointed out—spiritual discipline, religion, philosophy, and science encroached upon each other's territory.¹⁵⁸

On this note, I turn to Gregory's speculations on matter.

2.2 *A Theory of Matter*

After sketching the theological parameters of his discourse, we have seen in the preceding section, Gregory dismissed a series of futile questions that, he affirmed, deserved little attention. Among the sidelined topics were queries concerning the capacity of a boundless God to create a bounded reality, the relation between spirit and matter, and the nature of matter itself. At the end of the previous section I have proposed that in discriminating between worthwhile and worthless topics Gregory offered guidance to his studious brother and that therefore the distinction was part of his heuristic pedagogy. Quite

156 See for instance the sketch of comparative ontology in the following sentence: Ὡς ὁμοῦ τὰ πάντα τοῦ Θεοῦ περὶ τὴν κτίσιν νοεῖσθαι, τὸ θέλημα, τὴν σοφίαν, τὴν δύναμιν, τὴν οὐσίαν τῶν ὄντων ("everything that belongs to God, sc. will, wisdom, and power, are also noticed within the creation, (or in) the essence of existents"; *Apology* 7.15.6–8).

157 *Apology* 7.15.8–15 contains a negative appraisal of vain inquisitiveness. The same questions feature in *On the Soul and Resurrection*, without being attributed to intemperate minds. See Athenagoras Kokkinakis, "Τενυχὴ Εἰσαγωγή," in *Γρηγορίου Νύσσης Ἀπαντα τὰ Ἔργα*, 1:9–124, esp. 53–54. Cf. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 406.

158 Harrison, *Territories*, 1–19, 29–33.

soon, however, and perhaps to stir Peter's desire to explore these for himself, Gregory turned to the very "idle questions"—as Corsini called them¹⁵⁹—he previously claimed to be of no interest. One such issue is the nature of matter. Corsini doubts that matter is a central topic to *Apology's* discourse, particularly since Gregory disparages it as nonsense.¹⁶⁰ Whether central or peripheral, Gregory allocates generous space for its treatment, a fact that did not escape a number of scholars. Beginning by reviewing several relevant opinions, in what follows I look at aspects of his theory of matter. It will become obvious that this theory is instrumental towards grasping his view of chaos, which, in turn, is the key to unlock his cosmology.

Callahan found in Gregory's *Constitution* the proposal that matter's core is immaterial.¹⁶¹ Later, upon analysing *On the Soul and Resurrection*, Daniélou concluded that for Gregory matter originates in combinations of intelligible or immaterial qualities.¹⁶² In current parlance, at its core matter is information and energy. Other scholars have widened the scope, examining further relevant passages. Alexandre and Sorabji identified three significant texts situated in *Apology* (PG 44, 69BC), *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46, 124B–D), and *Constitution* 24 (PG 44, 212–213).¹⁶³ In addressing the three passages, both scholars noticed Gregory's effort to grapple with how an immaterial factor, namely, God, can cause a material creation. The difficulty resided in that Gregory inherited from classical philosophy the concept of ontological solidarity between cause and effect. A material effect points to a material cause and, conversely, an immaterial cause would produce an immaterial effect. Building upon Daniélou's conclusion, Sorabji proposed that in order to surmount this difficulty Gregory deploys an "idealistic theory of matter" by which he construes material objects as accretions of divine thoughts and ideal qualities. Specifically, he would move "from a view about cause to a conclusion about creation which involves idealism."¹⁶⁴ This approach, Sorabji continued, is not unlike Berkeley's at the daybreak of modernity. Athenagoras Kokkinakis

159 In his words, *questions oisives*. Corsini, "Nouvelles Perspectives," 95–96.

160 Corsini, "Nouvelles Perspectives," 96.

161 Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 42.

162 Daniélou, "Grégoire de Nysse," 15–16.

163 Alexandre, "L'Exégèse," 161–162, 165–166. Sorabji, *Time*, 290–291. See references to this discussion in Bradshaw, "Plato in the Cappadocians," 206–207 and Tollefsen, "Cosmology," 175–176.

164 Sorabji, *Time*, 287, 290–294. Similarly, Köckert (*Christliche Kosmologie*, 437, 439) discerns Platonic underpinnings in Gregory's concepts of matter and nature.

embraced this opinion, presenting Gregory as a precursor of Berkeley.¹⁶⁵ In turn, Alexandre and Tollefsen opposed this possibility,¹⁶⁶ and my ensuing analysis proves them right.

The issue of an immaterial causation of material objects is far from simple. We already know that in *Apology*, alongside the theological presupposition of the divine “will, wisdom, and power” for the universe’s emergence and nature, Gregory considers material objects through a scientific lens. In tune with the physics of his time, he discerns matter and form or rather substance and quality. But he deploys these distinctions in order to articulate a theology of creation and to affirm the connection between God and matter. Alexandre observed that these distinctions led him to realise that—since the divine thoughts are not outside the world—the immaterial cause is able to operate on the level of matter.¹⁶⁷ As with Origen’s physics and Basil’s principle of synergy, the divine thoughts determine the form of matter—its qualities—from within, not extrinsically. And since they are God’s imprint upon the cosmos, the divine thoughts mediate between the immaterial cause and the material effects. Idealism is restricted through infringement of the Platonic dogma of two realities: here, the metaphysical divide between intelligible and sensible or mind and matter is no longer applicable. Drawing on the doctrine of the incarnation, Bradshaw noted that Gregory’s idealism coupled with a realistic sense of matter.¹⁶⁸ In the same vein, Köckert explained that, here, idealism and realism hold together given that the qualities and the objects they constitute, albeit distinguishable, remain inseparable.¹⁶⁹ This, she added, is an original solution despite its antecedents.¹⁷⁰ Transcending both idealism and materialism, this theory of matter therefore renders powerless the famous witticism of Bertrand Russell’s grandmother, “What is mind? no matter; what is matter? never mind.”¹⁷¹

We shall discover shortly that for Gregory the divine thoughts, the ideal qualities of matter, and the material objects are an inextricable whole. This con-

165 Kokkinakis, “Τενική Εισαγωγή,” 54. For a prudent assessment of this connection, see Bradshaw, “Plato in the Cappadocians,” 207.

166 Alexandre, “L’Exégèse,” 167–168. Tollefsen, “Cosmology,” 176.

167 Alexandre, “L’Exégèse,” 167. Her assessment holds even though, as Sorabji (*Time*, 245) pointed out, matter is composed of “intelligible concepts” which differ from the “sensible” concreteness pertaining to objects.

168 Bradshaw, “Plato in the Cappadocians,” 207. See also the broader appraisal of this issue in Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 414–415.

169 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 437–438.

170 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 420–424.

171 Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography*, RC (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 33.

nection transpires through two passages within *Apology*, of which the scholars mentioned above ignore the second one. Here is the first excerpt:

To finish (making) the existents, (God) the wholly mighty established forcefully and at once—by way of his wise and powerful will—everything of which matter consists. (These are the components:) what is light and what is heavy, dense and porous, soft and hard, moist and dry, cold and hot, also colour, shape, contour, and extension. Taken one by one, all these are mere thoughts and concepts; none of these constitutes matter of itself (οὐ τι τούτων ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ὕλη ἐστίν); they become matter when they converge into one another (συνδραμόντα πρὸς ἄλληλα, ὕλη γίνεται).¹⁷²

The excerpt refers to God's activity that conditions the instantiation of matter as a concrete, ordered, and complex reality. It coheres with previously analysed texts, such as those that discuss the barrenness of the original chaos and its incapacity to interact with the divine energies until God's command.¹⁷³ What makes possible the existence of concrete and organised matter, sc. the cosmos, are God's wisdom and power that bring together a range of contrary qualities. The reference to divine power spares Gregory a detailed explanation—idealistic or otherwise—of how an immaterial cause produce material effects. In turn, the reference to divine wisdom suggests that the mechanics of cosmic emergence works according to reason, not by God's arbitrary decisions, even though the staggering divine power is at work. The importance of this theological statement cannot be underestimated. Gregory views the material objects as combined ideal qualities, but the theological conditioning of reality cancel all doctrinaire idealism. It is not the qualities by themselves which constitute structured matter (οὐ τι τούτων ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ὕλη ἐστίν).¹⁷⁴ The same statement excludes the materialistic reductionism of ancient atomistic theory. It is not the natural inclination of the atoms that leads them to aggregation. Idealism and materialism are not entirely incorrect, of course, as they refer to genuine aspects of reality. But they are incomplete because they ignore each other. They are wrong above all because they disregard divine wisdom and agency. This,

172 *Apology* 7.16.4–11. I am grateful to David Runia for improving my initial translation. For notes on this passage, see Kokkinakis, “Τενικὴ Εἰσαγωγή,” 54–56. For a synthesis of Nyssen's understanding of “at once,” or the simultaneity of the qualities and the beings, see Radde-Gallwitz, *A Literary Study*, 16, 70–71.

173 *Apology* 5.11.8–10; 16.27.8; 17.28.12–15.

174 See Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 416.

precisely, is the message of the excerpt under consideration, which points to Gregory's adherence to the principle of synergy, as discussed.

My version of the text brings to the fore five pairs of contraries by repeatedly including the conjunction "and," which does not appear in the original, between the first ten qualities. Only the last four qualities (colour, shape, contour, and extension) are not mutually opposite. The five pairs denote the difficulty of matter's emergence by itself. Matter does not exist; matter becomes through the convergence of these opposites (συνδραμόντα πρὸς ἄλληλα, ὕλη γίνεται). But, above all, it is the divine activity that facilitates—with both power and wisdom—the combination of incompatible qualities. If they combine naturally, the reference to God bringing them together would be of no use.

Another reason for my highlighting the five pairs is to convey the suggestion—wholly consistent with Gregory's views—that material creation is characterised by dynamism. Brian Daley mentioned the "dynamic qualities" of material reality.¹⁷⁵ The five pairs denote the workings of a contradictory dynamic at the heart of reality. Matter originates in inconsistency, opposition, and a fragile balance¹⁷⁶—a flimsy order which, deprived of divine activity, could not escape from the barren darkness of the initial chaos. Here, Gregory's theory of matter, depicting the fundamental inconsistency of reality, echoes Athanasius' physics, while it also anticipates contemporary quantum physics. Corresponding to the original chaos that had the potential to become light but was unable to become so without the divine utterance, material beings do not solely originate in their material fabric and its ideal qualities, although these are their content. In order to be active, to properly exist, both the primordial chaos and the material beings depend also on God who operates through the immaterial network of principles—the divine thoughts—permeating created reality. Regardless of the scale, as with Basil's natural theory, reality emerges at the intersection of natural and supernatural forces.

The theories of chaos and matter overlap. Given their inescapable correspondence, they can be harmonised as follows. By itself, matter is invisible, unstructured, inactive, and void, utterly deprived of substance. Although its qualities can be considered in the abstract, intrinsically matter is identical to

175 Brian E. Daley, "'The Human Form Divine': Christ's Risen Body and Ours According to Gregory of Nyssa," *SP* 41 (2006): 301–318, esp. 306–307.

176 I am grateful to David Runia who pointed out in a personal conversation that this stance evokes Philo's *De Plantatione* 10, where the elements would attack each other without divinely set boundaries.

chaos.¹⁷⁷ It is potentiality, not instantiation; a promise, not reality. What makes concrete beings out of potentiality and the ordered universe out of chaos is the divinely activated convergence of the opposite qualities listed above. Cosmic reality is the emergent phenomenon. And since Gregory represents the coming into being of all existents according to this schema, he undoubtedly shares with Basil the view that the cosmic advent is an ongoing event, not a once and for all, *illo tempore* occurrence.¹⁷⁸ He must allude to this understanding by alternating two different tenses in the relevant passage. Initially he uses the past tense (God “brought together”) only to shift to the present tense (“they become matter”). Unless this is a redactional mistake, the alternation of tenses means that what happened once—in the beginning—occurs continually, throughout the movement of the universe. The cosmos, or matter organised on a grand scale, was made once and is being made continuously out of the potentialities of chaos—the abstract, immaterial qualities of created matter—a process which corresponds to the contemporary notions of quantum fluctuations and cold dark matter. Either way, Gregory’s theories of matter-making and universe-making go hand in hand.

What we retain from all this is that, in the presence of God’s wisdom and power, the fundamental immaterial qualities aggregate into concrete material beings and these into a cosmos. In preparation of the next step of my analysis, I must once again point out that for Gregory matter is in essence concretised information or embodied rationality. Whether information is called quality, concept, number, pattern, or programme, matter is the hardware activated by a software. It is this perception—which reverberates in contemporary cosmology¹⁷⁹—that prompts him to introduce the ancient theory of the Logos as an organising principle. This is the topic of the next passage, which develops the statement about God’s deed as word or commandment¹⁸⁰ that gives structure to the creation, here bringing the fundamental element of light or fire into being. Here is the text:

Everything that comes into being is generated by means of reason (πάν
τὸ γινόμενον, λόγῳ γίνεταί), and nothing that is divinely constituted can be

177 *Apology* 16.27.10. See Alexandre, “L’Exégèse,” 172–174 and Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 14.

178 See Basil, *Hexaemeron* 9.2.1–4, 18–22.

179 Contemporary cosmologists do not shy away, however, from pointing to a rationality which, transcending the material universe, is nevertheless inseparable from the natural world. Barrow, *The Origin of the Universe*, 45. Davies, *The Mind of God*, 16, 57. Kaku, *Parallel Worlds*, 17–18, 196–198, 356.

180 τὸ ἔργον λόγος ἐστί (“the deed is word”; *Apology* 10.21.2).

thought of as irrational, fortuitous, and spontaneous. We must have faith, therefore, that a certain wise and organising principle (λόγον τινά σοφόν τε καὶ τεχνικόν) lies within each of the (created) beings.¹⁸¹

Gregory makes plain that nothing can exist apart from the divine milieu or without being anchored in a rational principle of divine origin (πᾶν τὸ γινόμενον, λόγῳ γίνεται). This stance serves well the current conversations between theologians and cosmologists who, we have seen above, agree that the material universe and the things within it, including life, possess an informational or rational foundation. That said, while contemporary scientists do not rush to acknowledge the divine source of cosmic rationality, Gregory's physics is theologically shaped. The qualities that enable the emergence of material objects are manifestations of a deeper reality, namely, the divine rationality or the divine thoughts, bearing the signature of God's Logos (λόγον τινά σοφόν τε καὶ τεχνικόν). Matter consists of information, or conceptual qualities, on the level of which created beings are in contact with the divine rational principle, God's Logos, who actively orders all things from within.

Elsewhere, Gregory further nuances creation's rationality and the involvement of the Logos in the material world. He mentions there "the Logos present within the nature of the creation" (τὸν ἐγκείμενον τῇ φύσει τῆς κτίσεως λόγον).¹⁸² Yet elsewhere he draws attention to "a certain divine Logos who imperatively establishes each of the wondrous beings that come into existence" (ἐκάστου τῶν γινομένων θαυμάτων λόγος τις θεῖος καθηγεῖται προστακτικός).¹⁸³ As for Basil, Gregory's cosmos is the workshop of divine activity—an activity which permeates the creation and imprints in all things the seal of divine rationality. Even without including musical imagery, these passages evoke Clement's depiction of a world full of logos. Either way, Gregory envisions a universe inseparable from its divine source that actively permeates it and contributes to the actualisation of its natural potentialities. And since the Logos is the universe's ultimate ground of being, though irreducible to it, the qualities which aggregate in the concreteness of beings manifest the thoughts and intentions of the Logos.¹⁸⁴

181 *Apology* 10.2–6. I thank David Runia for improving my initial translation. Sorabji altogether ignored this passage. In turn, Alexandre, "L'Exégèse," 169, referred to the relevant column in *PG* (44, 73A) only in relation to fire/light. Gregory could have borrowed the link between existence and reason from the atomists. See Freter, "Democritus on Being," 74.

182 *Apology* 26.40.7.

183 *Apology* 64.71.21–22. I am grateful to David Runia for this improved version of my initial translation.

184 Alexandre, *Le Commencement du Livre*, 89. Blowers, "Beauty," 15. Kokkinakis, "Τεχνική Εἰσαγωγή," 57. Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture*, 252.

Against this backdrop, reality's algorithm develops into the following schema. Material beings are actualisations of creation's natural potentialities or embodied forms of immaterial qualities; the latter translate the thoughts of the Logos and thus connect the material world with the divine; God is actively present everywhere, throughout the spacetime continuum or "the warped geometry of space and time,"¹⁸⁵ working together with and through the natural processes of the created universe. In the mathematical idiom of our age, this amounts to saying that the numbers of nature mediate between the divine reason and the concrete world of material objects. It is this realisation that prompts Gregory to assert that everything within the cosmos stems from a profound level of order that excludes both atheistic interpretations and facile notions of randomness. Thus, under the guise of his theory of matter, Gregory rehearses originally the proof of God from order already encountered in the thought of his contemporary, Athanasius.¹⁸⁶

All this confirms the apologetic nature of the treatise under consideration. In the same way that the ancients were able to discover patterns behind happenings and geodesics in the chaos of movement—like the golden ratio—contemporary scientists glance, beyond indeterminacy and serendipity, at levels of order which they articulate by way of quantum physics, chaos theory, and fractal theory. In short, as Asimov would say, "chaos turns out to have an underlying order."¹⁸⁷ Gregory proved to be a creative contributor to this tradition.

Having reviewed Gregory's theological theory of matter, which addresses the infinitesimal scale of created reality, I must now return to an aspect of his view of the macrocosm. Specifically, it is his dialectic of the creation as a single event and multiple events.

2.3 *A Single Event and Multiple Events*

Gregory's reflections on matter point the reader to a series of binaries pertaining to the universe's dynamism, such as potentiality and actuality, being and becoming, chaos and order, stasis and movement. In what follows I propose that he treats these binaries under the guise of creation as both a single event and multiple events. I mentioned this topic for the first time during the discussion about his interpretation of the first verse of Genesis. To anticipate the ensuing analysis, the first verse signifies creation as a single event, while the verses leading to the fourth day of creation denote a series of events. The dialectic of one and many escaped Giet, who pointed out that while Basil

185 I borrow the phrase from Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary's Handbook*, 12.

186 Athanasius, *Gentiles* 38, 42 etc. See Chapter Two.

187 Asimov, *Prelude to Foundation*, 25.

refers to a gradual process of creation Gregory focuses on creation as a single event.¹⁸⁸ Very recently, Zacchuber echoed this view by asserting that “there can be no doubt that he [sc. Gregory] accords priority to the level of unity, being, or *ousia*.”¹⁸⁹ In turn, Alexandre spotted the dialectical dimension of Gregory’s approach, but she chose to analyse only his reading of the first two verses of the narrative.¹⁹⁰ Köckert continued Alexandre’s approach and concluded, aptly, that given this dialectical aspect the received view about two creations in Gregory—of which the aspect of unity has priority over diversity—must be revised. The perspectives of a single event and multiple events cohere.¹⁹¹ Taking my cue from Alexandre and Köckert’s views, I now proceed to consider the broader context, that is, Gregory’s treatment of the first and the fourth days of the narrative. I refer the perspectives of a single event and multiple events to contemplative and to scientific viewpoints, respectively, in solidarity with the distinction between description and interpretation found from Clement to Basil to Gregory himself.

We shall soon discover that Gregory finds no contradiction between the two perspectives. The cosmos is ideal and real, ordered and evolving, and static and dynamic at the same time. The dialectic of unity and multiplicity therefore is the best way of articulating reality, for it bridges the binaries instead of annulling them. He treated this matter on two occasions, briefly, soon after the lengthy prologue of *Apology*,¹⁹² and extensively, right before the epilogue.¹⁹³ To the first occurrence of the topic I must now turn.

2.3.1 *Apology* 8–9

After discussing the wisdom and power of God as prerequisites of creation, in the eighth chapter Gregory addresses the opening word of Genesis. We already know that he preferred the rendition of Aquila, ἐν κεφαλαίῳ (“in general” or “in summary”), to the Septuagint’s ἐν ἀρχῇ (“in the beginning”).¹⁹⁴ In my earlier dealing with this matter I suggested that Gregory prioritised Aquila’s version due to its usefulness for articulating the topic of a single event and multiple

188 Giet, “Introduction,” 28–32.

189 Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 58. Similarly, Brown (*The Days of Creation*, 33) expressed the view that Gregory deemphasised the chronological aspect in favour of the ontological one.

190 Alexandre, “L’Exégèse,” 160. It goes the same for Lollar, *Contemplation of Nature*, 136–137.

191 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 437–438.

192 *Apology* 8.16.1–9.19.12.

193 *Apology* 64.71.19–74.80.22.

194 *Apology* 8.16.14–17.1.

events. But as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Alexandre noted¹⁹⁵ a more immediate reason must have conditioned his preference. Aquila's version proclaims more clearly than the Septuagint a God able to bring the universe into existence out of nothing and all at once, "together" (ἄθροώς) and within an "indivisible" (ἀχαρές) moment.¹⁹⁶ It befits the divine to create all things "together" and to perceive them as one, "indivisibly," at a glance. The first word of Genesis therefore presents "all things (as they are) perceived by the divine eye (τῷ θεῷ ὀφθαλμῷ)."¹⁹⁷ It is from this divine vantage point that creation is a single event and one reality. This conclusion corresponds to a contemplative view of the universe.

The ninth chapter introduces a very different perspective. When one examines the concrete modes in which the existents are brought into being, and as the rest of the scriptural narrative recounts,¹⁹⁸ creation appears as a series of events. In contrast with the contemplative view of the creation as a single event, this perspective matches the treatise's overall scientific or analytical outlook.

Gregory addresses creation's sequence by way of two classifications. A first taxonomy explicitly includes, in this order, the heaven, the ether, the stars, the fire, the air, the sea, the earth, animals, and plants.¹⁹⁹ The second taxonomy generally mentions the first element, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth etc.²⁰⁰ God brings into existence all these elements and beings at the appropriate time, adhering to a wise order that corresponds to the divine wisdom which operates at a fundamental level in the making of matter.²⁰¹ Elsewhere we read that this divinely ordered process takes the form of a purposeful evolutionary development: "the nature of things advances in order, necessarily completing

195 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 30. Alexandre ("L'Exégèse," 162–164) highlighted the Basilian source of this view. Basil's friend, Ambrose, appropriated the same view in his own *Hexaemeron*. J.C.M. van Winden, "In the Beginning: Some Observations on the Patristic Interpretations of Genesis 1, 1," in *Arche: A Collection of Patristic Studies by J.C.M. van Winden*, ed. J. den Boeft and D.T. Runia (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 61–77, esp. 63.

196 *Apology* 8.17.11; 16.26.16–18.

197 *Apology* 9.18.12. See Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 424–426.

198 *Apology* 9.18.8–9.

199 *Apology* 9.18.11.

200 *Apology* 9.18.13–19.4. *PG* 44, 72BC contains a reference to fire as the first element in this second list, which contradicts the order of the elements in the first list. By excluding the word πῦρ (fire), Drobner significantly contributed to the clarity of the text.

201 *Apology* 10.2–6. Sorabji altogether ignored this passage. In turn, Alexandre ("L'Exégèse," 169) referred to the relevant column in *PG* (44, 73A) only in relation to fire/light. Here, Gregory follows once again Philo. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 252.

the previous ones by the steps that follow.”²⁰² The two statements, one about God’s work and the other about the movement of nature, complement each other, once again describing reality as synergy. Here, Gregory does not follow Basil’s direct fashion, preferring Origen’s implicit articulation of the topic. As a result, the cosmos is in motion, growing ever more complex by the ongoing actualisation of nature’s latent potentialities.²⁰³ But complexity is not only about multiplicity. It entails structure, order—the coherence of creation as a single event—which denotes God’s wisdom. Alexandre perfectly captured this situation: “La création du monde par Dieu est globale, simultanée (ἁθρόα), mais elle se déploie dans l’espace (διάστημα), selon un ordre, un enchaînement (τάξις, εἰρμός, ἀκολουθία) prévu en sa totalité par la prescience divine.”²⁰⁴

These chapters on creation as a single event and multiple events present therefore two complementary views of the cosmic reality, as unity and diversity, or rather unity in diversity. The key to understand this situation is the perception of the cosmos as complex, ordered, dynamic, and evolving. Gregory returns to this solution through the botanical analogy of a sowed seed not yet grown into a plant. The way the plant exists within the seed in potentiality, “initially all things were potentially (δυνάμει) within God’s desire ... not at all in actuality (ἐνεργεία).”²⁰⁵ In that state, perfectly unified and coherent, the universe was folded within itself, not yet unfolded—it was an “unseen simplicity,”²⁰⁶ to paraphrase Barnes and Lewis, or rather a physical singularity. The universe, then, “was and was not” (ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἦν).²⁰⁷ It was potentially there, but not in reality. The essence of all things, *ousia*, is initially the promise of things to come, not the existents themselves. The primordial chaos contained everything at once, the “principles, causes, and potentialities” of all things.²⁰⁸ But in order to exist,

202 ἡ φύσις τῶν ὄντων δι’ ἀκολουθοῦ βαδίζουσα, τὸ ἀναγκαιῶς τοῖς προγεγονόσιν ἐπόμενον ἐξεργάζεται (*Apology* 25.37.11–13). The statement concludes a discussion begun in *Apology* 24.36.2–37.10. Gregory already rehearsed this approach in *Constitution* 8 (*PG* 44, 144.55–145.23). A similar evolutionary perspective, which includes human beings, features in Gregory’s younger contemporary, Nemesius (*On Human Nature* 1.3.13–4.16).

203 For the notion of simultaneous creation, or “a single event,” as potentiality, see Blowers, *Drama*, 112–113, 146–153 (the latter pages dealing more with anthropology than with cosmology).

204 Alexandre, “L’Exégèse,” 160. Cf. Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 56–58.

205 *Apology* 16.27.10–4. For the use of this analogy in Gregory and his traditional predecessors, see Köckert, “The Seed,” 27–32 and *Christliche Kosmologie*, 465–481. Other scholars also referred to this image. O’Brien, “Creation,” 15. Gil-Tamayo, “Akoulouthia,” 16. Johannes Zachhuber, “Physis,” in *BDGN*, 615–620, esp. 617.

206 Barnes and Lewis, *The Cosmic Revolutionary’s Handbook*, 22.

207 *Apology* 16.27.15–16. See Alexandre, “L’Exégèse,” 172. Kokkinakis, “Τενική Εἰσαγωγή,” 56.

208 Alexandre, “L’Exégèse,” 163.

like the seed becoming a plant, individual beings (τὰ καθ' ἑκάστων)²⁰⁹ have to advance from potentiality to actuality or full reality.²¹⁰ Latent potentiality—or the universe's fundamental unity—is sequentially actualised and ordered by way of the multiple events of creation's dynamic evolution. It is in only in this way that the pieces of Gregory's worldview begin to interlock.

2.3.2 *Apology* 64–74

As a preamble to the topic of the third heaven,²¹¹ one of Peter's concerns,²¹² the relevant chapters return to the creation as a single event and multiple events.²¹³ The matter is tackled at length, highlighting better than before the dialectical relation between the first and the fourth days of creation.

Peter wondered why the Genesis account does not connect the first created light and the celestial bodies of the fourth day.²¹⁴ Gregory could have easily dismissed the impasse by glorifying the almighty God who so wished things to be done and by invoking scriptural infallibility. Such an answer would have been consistent with his devotion to the Scriptures²¹⁵ and his view of creation's evolution in the parameters of the God's "wisdom, will, and power."²¹⁶ But he chose to address the issue against the backdrop of his customary naturalism. His solution is ingenious, drawing on the physics of light. What he proposes is that the light (Gen 1:3) that "sprang forth before everything else"²¹⁷ denotes the universe's consistency as a single event or one reality. Light as an expression of cosmic unity is not an isolated motif,²¹⁸ but Gregory's pitch features among its earliest Christian iterations. What matters is that his view of the pri-

209 *Apology* 16.27.14.

210 For this process, see Radde-Gallwitz, *A Literary Study*, 16; Johannes Zachhuber, "Plêrôma," in *B D G N*, 626–628, esp. 627 (with reference to *PG* 44, 113C).

211 *Apology* 75.81.1–76.83.9.

212 *Apology* 3.9.1–9.

213 *Apology* 64.71.19–74.80.22.

214 *Apology* 3.8.12–9.9.

215 *Apology* 1.6.1–2.8.1.

216 *Apology* 7.14.13–15.8; 9.19.6–15; 64.71.21–72.15; 65.72.18–73.1; 69.75.19–76.12.

217 *Apology* 65.72.19–22.

218 His appraisal of light as unity finds an echo in Adomnán's description—mentioned in Chapter Three—of Columba's ecstatic vision of the universe. Cf. *Columba* 1.1.35. I am grateful to David Bradshaw for pointing me to his discussion of Benedict of Nursia's similar vision of light, described in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* 2.35 and reiterated in Gregory Palamas' *Triads* 1.3.22. See David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 239. Also, in Chapter Three I mentioned Diadochus' (*Texts* 75.13–16) vision of the world as light, without the aspect of unity coming to the fore.

mordial light overlaps with and clarifies the meaning he identified in the first word of the narrative. Light reveals the universe's homogenous substance and energy. In turn, the sidereal bodies of the fourth day of creation relate to the sequential development of the cosmos. They illustrate a series of events that result in cosmic multiplicity and complexity. While the first line of Genesis ("in the beginning God made heaven and earth") "refers to the fact that (God) created the wholeness of beings (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ὄντων), the (scriptural) discourse resolved to distinctly display the becoming of each being (τὴν γινομένην ἐκάστου τῶν ὄντων) by a natural order of sorts (ἐν τάξει τινὶ φυσικῇ)."²¹⁹ This statement should be taken both epistemologically and ontologically.

In epistemological terms, it is a matter of double perception. The single event of creation that encompasses the totality of the universe (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ὄντων) is narratively described according to naturalist principles (ἐν τάξει τινὶ φυσικῇ) as a series of events leading to the instantiation of the existents (τὴν γινομένην ἐκάστου τῶν ὄντων). The scriptural account therefore illustrates two different viewpoints, one divine, or theological, and one natural, or scientific. As they are incommensurable, these viewpoints neither agree nor disagree. Contradiction is impossible because they do not read as successive lines on one page, one after the other. They tell altogether different stories about a reality irreducible to a single viewpoint. Here, Gregory appears to develop Basil's point about bodies perceived as both simple and complex.²²⁰ But this is not to say that the two perspectives intersect. As they are equally valid, they complement each other epistemologically by highlighting different aspects of reality.

In ontological terms, it is purely a matter of physics. The single event initiated multiple events or processes of increasing diversification which resulted in the universe's multiplicity. In the words of Gregory, "up to then (sc. the divine command), (light) was gathered within itself, coextensive with the whole (περὶ ἐαυτὴν ἡθροισμένη καὶ περιπολοῦσα τὸ πᾶν), but after (the commandment) it diversified into what was shared and what distinct (πρὸς τὰ συγγενῇ τε καὶ κατὰλληλα διακρίνεται) with reference to its own parts."²²¹ Initially, light was homogeneous and coextensive with the nature of the primordial universe, locked inside the darkness of chaos, of the initial singularity. It was unlocked at the propitious time and it has become the energetic—luminous—content of the many and diverse forms of material aggregation. As such, the expanding

219 *Apology* 64.72.10–15.

220 Basil, *Against Eunomius* 1.6.21–29. But the similarity between their accounts also refers to the perception of the "days of creation" as illustrating a human viewpoint. Cf. Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 35; Radde-Gallwitz, *A Literary Study*, 141–142.

221 *Apology* 65.72.22–26.

cosmos and all its complexity stream out of the ontological unity called light, without ever breaking off from it. This is another expression of nature's homogeneity, echoing Athanasius and Basil's views. We retain that Gregory produces a view of the universe simultaneously comprehensive and detailed.²²²

Against this backdrop, of an exegetical importance is that what one might infer from Gregory's position is that sidereal diversity is mentioned only in the fourth stage of the narrative because this is when our cosmic neighbourhood had taken a familiar shape. But he does not address this matter explicitly. What he does say is that the three days—which, according to the creation narrative, separate the original light from the astronomical bodies of the fourth day—represent the necessary time for all things to be illumined and so reach concreteness, becoming visible to observers.²²³ Which is the same.

Whether from an epistemological or an ontological perspective, his theory of light once again articulates cosmic complexity as unity and multiplicity. This comprehensive and detailed view of the universe was as problematic then as it is today. The contemporary quest for a theory of everything experiences similar difficulties.²²⁴ In what follows I consider this complex articulation more closely, focusing upon its ontological dimension.

Light, this “fiery and luminous (πυρώδης καὶ φωτιστική) power of the creation,”²²⁵ signifies unity when it refers to the cosmos as a totality, but denotes diversity when it refers to the seven celestial spheres.²²⁶ Gregory borrows the latter concept from the Ptolemaic system, which, like the fire itself, is absent from Genesis. And given that the Ptolemaic spheres belong to the realm of astronomy²²⁷ (thus they do not include the rabbinic cosmography of the seven spiritual heavens), he engages in a physicalist rewriting of the scriptural narrative. Particularly his explanations for the way that light expands and diversifies into cosmic complexity are of a physical nature. His view looks surprisingly modern.

Corresponding to the ascent of the created existent from the mineral to the vegetal to the animal to the intellectual—discussed in *Constitution*²²⁸—*Apology*'s universe unfolds through “the stretch of time” (χρόνου διάστημα). It

222 *Apology* 65.72.22–25; 68.75.3–5.

223 *Apology* 69.75.8–10.

224 Davies, *The Mind of God*, 21, 33, 136, 167–168.

225 *Apology* 65.72.20. John Damascene (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.7) rehearsed the same idea in the eighth century.

226 *Apology* 65.72.16–73.19.

227 Anne Tihon, “Alexandrian Astronomy in the 2nd Century AD: Ptolemy and His Times,” in *The Alexandrian Tradition*, 73–91, esp. 73–77.

228 *Constitution* 8 (PG 44, 144–148).

moves from the original unity to the seven sidereal spheres through a “seven-fold division” (see ἑπταχὴ μερισθῆναι), resulting in as many kinds of luminous radiation, solar, lunar, stellar etc.²²⁹ Time therefore—which finds metaphorical expression in the seven scriptural days of creation—is the process of cosmic movement and diversification.²³⁰ Time is integral to what Köckert calls “*diakrisis*-cosmogony,” the natural process of differentiation.²³¹ Through natural differentiation, the original light generates the sidereal bodies, of which some are sources and others receptors of light. Several chapters later, Gregory returns to this process by stating that the “general and shared light” (καθολικὴ τε καὶ γενικὴ φῶς) of the origins first “circumscribed the contours of the firmament” (ἐπηκολούθησε τοῦ στερεώματος περιγραφῇ) and then, “circling, established the cycles of fire” (τῇ κυκλοτερεῖ περιόδῳ τοῦ πυρὸς ὀρίσθεισα).²³² By representing diversification as a fiery process, cosmic dynamism—“permanent mobility”²³³—explains why all things are light, why all are fire. Energy permeates everything as the very essence of things yet taking different shapes according to the specific parameters and movements of the astronomical objects. This is, succinctly, how the celestial bodies of the seven spheres came into being, through the dynamic variation of light.

Gregory had more to say about the cosmic differentiation. In *Apology* 72–74,²³⁴ he noted that creation’s homogeneity, signified by the primordial light, fluctuates together with the movement of beings, their speed, and other physical particularities.²³⁵ As in Aristotelian physics,²³⁶ what causes movement are the tensions and tendencies inherent to the fundamental elements and the natural qualities of things,²³⁷ not extraneous factors. And as the elements tend to “distance themselves from one another,”²³⁸ the natural qualities of existents

229 *Apology* 66.73.20–74.13.

230 ἐν χρόνῳ κινεῖται πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον (“all moving things move in time”; *Apology* 73.79.7). On the relation between movement and time in Gregory, see David Bradshaw, “Time and Eternity in the Greek Fathers,” *The Thomist* 70 (2006): 311–366, esp. 335–337.

231 Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie*, 461–465.

232 *Apology* 72.78.1–22.

233 Cf. ἡ φύσις ἐστὶ πρὸς τὴν κίνησιν (“nature is in motion”) and ἡ φύσις τὸ ἀεικίνητον (“ever-moving nature”) in *Apology* 72.78.16–22. For nature as “kinetic existence,” see Scot Douglass, “Kinêsis,” in *BDGN*, 436–437, esp. 436.

234 *Apology* 72.78.1–74.80.22.

235 *Apology* 74.80.11–16. Wallace-Hadrill, *View of Nature*, 11, 18.

236 In Aristotle’s *Physics* 2.1, nature itself is the source of motion and change. I am grateful to David Bradshaw for this insight and reference.

237 *Apology* 72.78.6.

238 διαστελλονται ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων (*Apology* 72.78.6).

determine their destination, their place in the universe.²³⁹ Specifically, lighter objects move upwards, constituting the higher spheres, whereas the heavier ones move downwards, constituting the lower spheres.

Gregory explains how this process occurs in a couple of ways. The first is the scriptural example of separation between dry land and the sea or—in terms of the fundamental elements—between earth and water.²⁴⁰ The primordial light came to be divided into the celestial bodies of the fourth day in the same way.²⁴¹ Of course, this is an analogical statement about differentiation, not an explanation of the phenomenon. Second, and proving once again his scientific cast of mind, he devises a physical experiment by mixing liquid mercury, water, and oil.²⁴² He notices that the mixed components—signifying the initial chaos—naturally tend to separate from one another. The mercury plunges to the bottom of the vessel, the oil moves towards the surface, while the water remains in between the other two ingredients. In like manner, the homogeneous light of creation becomes diversified into the various celestial spheres and bodies due to their respective weight and speed.²⁴³ This experiment is definitely more interesting than the previous explanation but, since it draws on another analogy, ultimately it is not very convincing. Only modern experiments have produced satisfactory explanations of how the universe's fundamental stuff has become—as it still does—the many things around us. The conclusion that the primordial light was transformed into the diversity of the cosmos is nevertheless significant. In reaching this conclusion and as a precursor to Grosseteste's medieval cosmology of light,²⁴⁴ Gregory anticipates perceptions of our own age, provided, of course, that light is understood as energy. As Basarab Nicolescu states, the complex universe is made out of a prodigiously diversified energy.²⁴⁵ What is certain is that in referring to the diversification of the primordial light Gregory perceives the expanding universe as fundamentally homogeneous.²⁴⁶

239 Gregory stated that what conditions the “place” of each star and constellation are their respective natures. See J.C.M. van Winden, “A Textual Problem in Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia* in *Hexaemeron*, ch. 69,” *VC* 33:2 (1979): 179.

240 *Apology* 72.78.4–7.

241 *Apology* 72.78.11; 73.79.4–5.

242 *Apology* 74.79.18–80.22.

243 *Apology* 74.80.11–16.

244 Recently, Grosseteste's cosmology of light has become the object of an interdisciplinary analysis. Richard G. Bower et al., “A Medieval Multiverse? Mathematical Modelling of the Thirteenth Century Universe of Robert Grosseteste,” *PRS A* (2014) 470: 20140025. Tom C.B. McLeish et al., “A Medieval Multiverse,” *Nature* 507 (2014): 161–163.

245 Nicolescu, *Nous, la particule et le monde*, 57–63.

246 Scot Douglass, “Diastêma,” in *BDGN*, 227–228. See also Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, “Creation,” in *BDGN*, 183–190, esp. 185–186.

Homogeneity furthermore means for him, alongside consistency, orderliness. Behind the overwhelming scenery of cosmic differentiation, he notices a deeper ground of unity, an intrinsic “order” (τάξιν) related to “the sequence (ἀκολουθίαν) of creation of the beings.”²⁴⁷ This principle of order is inherently natural²⁴⁸ and manifests itself through the process of specification. The immovable fundamental order of created beings and their natural mobility characterise the cosmos.²⁴⁹ Order is stable and nature is in motion. The universe consequently is both changing and unchanging. This synthesis of order and movement, unity and multiplicity, reveals the originality of Gregory’s representation of nature and its independence from its ancient sources.

His worldview indeed is unaffected by the tensions of most ancient cosmologies, which experienced difficulties in bridging movement and order, multiplicity and unity. What facilitated his success is beyond doubt his commitment to Christian theology, which deploys a range of paradoxes in formulating the mystery of God as triunity. Gregory must have taken his cue in cosmology from Nicene theology. After all, as one scholar has pointed out, he was not insensitive to the marks of the Trinity within the cosmos.²⁵⁰ At any rate, his notion of an underlying order that doubles nature’s movement was the road less travelled in his time. It likewise predates by many centuries the current quest for integrative models of complexity able to account for coherence and change in an expanding universe. The fact that Gregory could not employ the tools of contemporary mathematics, physics, and cosmology does not make his insight less impressive and his approach less scientific. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the historians of science overlook his contributions.²⁵¹

To bring this discussion to a close, we retain a number of matters. First, the double approach to the topic of creation as a single event and multiple events. In an epistemological sense, as with Clement, this paradox betrays the limi-

247 *Apology* 71.77.16–17.

248 τάξει τινι φυσικῇ (“a natural order of sorts”; *Apology* 73.79.14).

249 ἡ μὲν τάξις ἐν τοῦτοις τὸ ἀκίνητον ἔχει ἡ δὲ φύσις τὸ ἀεικίνητον (“while the order in these (bodies) is immovable, (their) nature is ever-moving”; *Apology* 72.78.15–16).

250 David Bentley Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*,” *MTh* 18.4 (2002): 541–561.

251 John Gribbin stated that nothing really happened in science after the ancient Greeks and up until Copernicus. See his *Science: A History* 1543–2001 (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 4. While believing that something did happen, David C. Lindberg made no mention of Gregory. See his “Early Christian Attitudes toward Nature,” 57–72. Although he mentioned Gregory’s contributions, Stramara, “Surveying the Heavens,” 153–155, altogether ignored *Apology*. In turn, Wallace-Hadrill (*View of Nature*, 38) believed that Gregory’s work “is of little importance in the history of scientific thought.”

tations of human mind, unable to grasp the complex unity of reality. Human mind considers cosmic multiplicity in its temporal unfolding, or the multiple events, whereas the divine or contemplative gaze circumscribes the whole at a glance, as a single event. In an ontological sense, the universe's fundamental unity becomes multiplicity through a natural process of differentiation. Creation as a single event generates multiple events. Second, and related, the complexity of Gregory's grasp of reality. His perception of creation as a single event and multiple events denotes his capacity for complex thinking; we already encountered it in his treatment of chaos and material emergence. His approach escaped the ancient reductionist representations which were unable to reconcile the material and the immaterial, order and movement, unity and diversity. It would have likewise avoided modern pitfalls such as the creationist focus on a single event and the evolutionist focus on multiple events. Third, Gregory's theologically conditioned naturalism. Created reality is entirely natural, but divine factors internally condition its parameters and rhythms.

The aspects of unity and diversity, potentiality and actuality, being and becoming, stability and movement fascinated him. His main concern however was to point out how everything occurred—orderly,²⁵² not randomly²⁵³—within the divine wisdom. The rigorous description of the universe's emergence and other natural phenomena according to the science of his time is but one side of his treatise. The other side—the interpretation of that description in the light of Genesis and the doctrine of creation—reveals Gregory's true apologetic desire to produce a Christian worldview.

3 Conclusions

This chapter discussed aspects of Christian worldview present in Gregory of Nyssa's *Apology*. What stirred my interest in this treatise is the silence of later tradition about it. To make sense of this situation, I proposed that it is its metaphysical, spiritual, and theological meagreness—doubled by a disproportionate preference for lengthy scientific descriptions—that may have led to lack of attention. It is possible that because of the same reasons the treatise does not fare much better in its contemporary reception, given the overall lack of interest that humanities scholars show in matters scientific. To compensate for the current lack of awareness, in the first half of the chapter I considered its main

252 τῆς κατὰ τὸ ἐφεξῆς ἀκολουθίας ("after a successive order"; *Apology* 9.19.4–5).

253 οὐκ αὐτομάτῳ τινὶ συντυχίᾳ, κατὰ τινὰ ἄτακτον καὶ τυχαίαν φερόν ("not as an autonomous occurrence, like some disordered and random product"; *Apology* 9.19.5–6).

characteristics and relation to Basil's *Hexaemeron*, and then allocated the second half to *Apology*'s significant contributions to the early Christian cosmology. Let me detail some of my most important findings.

Against the common view that it is an exegetical tract, I showed that *Apology* is, as its title makes plain, an apologetic writing. My interpretation accounts for Gregory's obvious preference for scientific explanations of physical phenomena, the scanty exegetical material included in the work, and the author's transparent desire to propose a theologically conditioned representation of reality. His strategy radically differs from the modern god-of-the-gaps approach²⁵⁴ which attempts to fill the blank spots within the developing scientific theories by theological statements. Recent history proves the god-of-the-gaps approach a failure, the expanding body of knowledge leaving no room for supernaturalist explanations. In turn, while he was convinced that the cosmos points to its creator, Gregory found no difficulty in explaining the natural phenomena in a scientific perspective. It is not theology that fills the gaps of the developing scientific narrative; the sciences fill the gaps in the Christian worldview. This is not to say that God's action is out of the question. Gregory's naturalism is open at both ends, namely, towards theology and the sciences. In the footsteps of Origen and Basil, he subscribed to the principle of synergy, believing that all things in nature occur through the ongoing interaction of divine and cosmic energies, not by discontinuous divine interventions. Understanding nature in this way, he was spared the futile effort to replace the scientific data by theological hypotheses. He respected the integrity and autonomy of both theology and the sciences.

Apology represents a valuable guide for anyone who works for the theological interpretation of contemporary science. Contemporary theologians should approach the current scientific paradigm the way Gregory tackled the scientific framework of his own time—not by overriding the tasks of science, but by articulating a theologically conditioned and scripturally rooted interpretation of cosmology. In the second part of the chapter I surveyed several examples of his handling of challenging topics, such as the relationship between God and the cosmos, the structure of matter, the universe as an emergent phenomenon,

²⁵⁴ See the chapters of Colin A. Russell, "The Conflict of Science and Religion," 12–17; Frederick Suppe, "Epistemology," 27–34; Kenneth J. Howell, "Theodicy," 85–87, in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Garry B. Ferngren, GR LH 1833 (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 13, 27, 31, 86. Cf. Victor Reppert, "The Argument from Reason," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 344–390, esp. 384–386.

and the creation as a single event and multiple events. Through extrapolation, these cases may inform contemporary theologians on how to convey the message of Genesis—or, more broadly, the Christian doctrine of creation—through the available scientific channels, not despite or against them. To that end I suggested a few possible parallels between Gregory's representation of reality and contemporary science. One case is his understanding that the phenomena occurring at the scale of the infinitely small affect the macrocosm, a point which anticipates the contemporary quest for a quantum cosmology. It is my conviction that *Apology* transcends its immediate context by paving the way for the communication of the Christian doctrine of creation and the theological message of Genesis through any scientific paradigm.

On this note, I must now turn to a different topic, the relationship between humankind and the cosmos, by which I return to a matter addressed in Chapter One and, tangentially, in other places. Gregory will be once again our guide, but in the company of other writers.

Anthropic Perspectives

The cosmological approach discussed in Chapter Six is not the only lens through which Gregory of Nyssa considered the world.¹ In what follows I turn to another of his contributions, which I analyse against the backdrop of his theological and literary context. I focus on his representation—which he shared with some of his predecessors and peers—of the relationship between humankind and the cosmos in terms of royalty. I propose that this particular representation is free of all anthropocentric tinge and that it corresponds to what modern thinkers call the anthropic cosmological principle.

I referred to anthropic cosmology throughout this book, but a brief introduction to how I use it here is in order. My earlier references to the principle, without being casual, did not apply to strong instances in patristic literature, whereas this chapter does. I begin by an overview of the principle's recent history. The anthropic cosmological principle is a contemporary, philosophically scented way of thinking that builds a unified worldview across a number of scientific disciplines. It is a comprehensive framework that connects anthropology, astrophysics, biology, cosmology, and physics. Brandon Carter proposed it in the early 1970s as a way to account for the striking correlation between the parameters of the universe and the existence of humankind.² Cosmologists like John Barrow, Roger Penrose, Henry Stapp, and Frank Tipler, to name but a few, developed his insights into variants of the principle. Others however—like Stephen Hawking—suspected it of metaphysical bias and dismissed its more daring postulates. Signs of anthropic thinking were already present in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's thought, where they intersected with profound philosophical, teleological, and theological insights.³ Whether one traces the contemporary roots of anthropic cosmology to Teilhard de Chardin or to its formulations in Carter and his adherents, what matters is that the principle

1 This chapter reutilises material from my study, "The King, the Palace, and the Kingdom," which it presents in a completely new and expanded form.

2 Brandon Carter, "Large Number Coincidences and the Anthropic Principle in Cosmology," in *Confrontation of Cosmological Theories with Observational Data*, ed. M.S. Longair (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1974), 291–298.

3 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humain* (Paris: Seuil, 1955). See also Dumitru Popescu et al., *Știință și teologie: Preliminarii pentru dialog* (București: XXI Eonul dogmatic, 2000), 220–234.

bridges various ways of knowing and fields of study. In so doing, it raises questions about the place of humankind in the universe. Such questions are largely philosophical, but they sometimes accommodate theological viewpoints, as Dumitru Stăniloae's anthropic discourse does.⁴ Nevertheless, proponents of the principle affirm its scientific legitimacy.

Here I am not concerned with the scientific credentials of the anthropic principle. Nor am I interested in rigorously mapping its various formulations, as for example the “weak” version, referring to the inextricable connection between humanity's existence and the constants of nature; or the “strong” version, proposing that the very emergence of our species retrospectively conditioned the initial parameters of the universe; or the “final” version, which postulates that, due to the ontological consistency of humankind and the cosmos, in the far future humanity will take total control of the matrix of reality through advanced technology.⁵ But I am interested in showing that the holistic perspective of the anthropic principle challenges entrenched prejudices of our time. It dissolves the division between cosmology and anthropology, or, as Tom Griffiths put it, “ecology and empire,”⁶ together with its offshoot, the separation of the natural sciences from the humanities. It likewise dissolves the far more terrible consequence of that division, namely, an anthropocentrism largely responsible for the irrational exploitation of the earth's ecosystem and for the carelessness of our “oncogenic species”⁷ in regard to the environment. The anthropic principle proposes a different paradigm from the contemporary culture of divisions, greed, and exploitation. It offers a framework where humankind's existence no longer registers as a meaningless byproduct of the universe's evolution which, in turn, causes the disruption of nature.

4 I discussed his anthropic approach in the following studies: “A Theology of the World,” 205–222; “Colocviul fără sfârșit,” 201–207, 219–223. See also Popescu et al., *Știință și teologie*, 202–219.

5 Barrow, *The Constants of Nature*, 141–176. John D. Barrow, *Between Inner Space and Outer Space: Essays On Science, Art, and Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 19–30. Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 15–26. Roger Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of Physics* (Penguin Books, 1991), 354, 433–444. Henry P. Stapp, *Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer*, second edn (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 6–7, 11–12. Trinh, *La mélodie secrète*, 287–288, 292–296.

6 Tom Griffiths, “Ecology and Empire: Towards an Australian History of the World,” in *Ecology and Empire*, 1–16, esp. 1, 11.

7 Mathieu Giraudeau et al., “Human Activities might Influence Oncogenic Processes in Wild Animal Populations,” *Nature Ecology & Evolution* (May 2018), available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-018-0558-7> (accessed 24 May 2018).

Enabling the current culture of divisions and exploitation is a series of rifts in the march of modernity, rifts that oppose humankind and the environment, culture and nature, history and the cosmos, the mind and the body. There is nothing anthropic about these separations. By contrast, in premodern cultures—including those of the Christian tradition, early and medieval—anthropic thinking was the norm. In most traditional cultures, to this day, totemic ancestors indicate a sense of belonging with layers of reality, biological and otherwise, which precede humankind.⁸ That the early Christians shared in the anthropic mentality of ancient traditional societies can be verified by patristic examples. These continue the Pauline view of the catastrophic impact of fallen humankind upon the natural world.⁹ Such samples of anthropic thinking include, apart from *Diognetus*, already discussed in Chapter One, Theophilus of Antioch's work, *To Autolycus*. Theophilus represented the rippling effect of the fall by the analogy of a household where the servants mimic the conduct of the master.¹⁰ He believed that animals had not been made wild and dangerous. They have become so because of human sin. In short, terrestrial animals emulate the disobedience of humans towards God by becoming disobedient to humans. This is a clear example of anthropic impact upon the earth's biosphere, or what contemporary literature calls the mark of the "anthropocene."¹¹

At the end of the fourth century, John Chrysostom, an important witness of this tradition, adopted the same view. In turn, both John and his immediate source, Gregory of Nyssa, found further inspiration from Philo of Alexandria.¹² It is from him that they borrowed another version of the household image, the analogy of the king, the palace, and the kingdom. Philo used this illustration as one among many possible answers to the problem of humankind's creation after the universe and everything within it.¹³ Of particular interest is the fourth answer.¹⁴ There he retold the Genesis narrative of creation as the story of a

8 Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 27–46.

9 Rom 8:18–23. See Blowers, *Drama*, 212.

10 *To Autolycus* 2.17.14–23.

11 Erle C. Ellis, *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

12 For the influence of Philo on Gregory's hexaemeral treatises, see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 351–356. According to Runia, Antiochene authors such as John did not favour Philo (Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 270), but the presence of the image under consideration here may denote at least an indirect influence, via Gregory. Before both Gregory and John, it is possible that Athanasius borrowed Philo's relevant image. See Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 196; Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 416–417.

13 Philo, *Creation* 77–88.

14 Philo, *Creation* 83–86.

royal palace prepared for the arrival of its king. In order to address other concerns related to humanity's late arrival on the cosmic scene, Gregory and John addressed this analogy in slightly different ways.

In what follows I focus on the variants of this royal analogy in Gregory and John. From time to time I also refer to such early Christian authors as Theophilus of Antioch, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nemesius of Emesa, and Theodoret of Cyrus, whose input complements the discourse of the two main thinkers. Since they do not employ this analogy, I do not treat in detail the contributions of these other authors. My goal is to show that—together with preaching human uniqueness and superiority—these traditional thinkers depict the place of humankind within the earth's ecosystem and the cosmos in a very balanced manner. They make room for the part and for the whole, for the human event and for nature, acknowledging that all things participate in what Lewis calls the "Great Dance."¹⁵ Their way of thinking, I propose, anticipates the holistic framework of contemporary anthropic cosmology. Before I turn to their contributions, I must mention that alongside obvious examples of anthropic thinking below we shall encounter several familiar motifs and approaches, including a fourth-century counterpoint to the Disciple's dilemma concerning the place of Christians in the grand scheme of things. And so, Chapter Seven closes the metaphorical bracket opened with *Diognetus* in Chapter One, by showing how Christians viewed the relationship between humankind and the cosmos at the end of the fourth century and in the early fifth century.

1 Gregory of Nyssa

In harmony with most premodern thinkers and traditions, Gregory developed a comprehensive worldview. This worldview gathers together what our own culture still treats under the separate headings of anthropology and cosmology. The contemporary situation where cosmologists and anthropologists ignore each other was inconceivable in late antiquity. Ancient natural philosophers could show interest in one field without becoming oblivious of the other.¹⁶ Researching the human phenomenon led them to an understanding of the universe and, in like manner, cosmic exploration led to anthropological insights. To Gregory's own mind, therefore, the view that his treatise relevant here, *Consti-*

15 Lewis, *Perelandra* (ch. 17), 334–339.

16 It appears that the trailblazer of this tradition was Democritus. See Freter, "Democritus on Being," 67–84.

tution,¹⁷ is purely anthropological,¹⁸ would be quite strange. But not all scholars miss his point. Independently, Jean Laplace,¹⁹ Giulio Maspero,²⁰ and Johannes Zachhuber²¹ observed that he tackles anthropological matters against the backdrop of cosmology. The layout of the treatise corroborates their assessment. After an exposition on physics and cosmology, he discusses the evolution of life and the characteristics of various lifeforms. Only after these does he turn to anthropology, not without continuing reference to matters cosmological and biological. His linking cosmology (including physics, geology, environmental matters, and biology) and anthropology is in every way significant for my purposes here. So is also the methodological similarity between *Constitution* and *Apology*, discussed in Chapter Six above, pertaining to their apologetic nature. Corresponding to *Apology*'s markedly cosmological discourse, Gregory combines in *Constitution* a scripturally based theological outlook and scientific analysis.

The cosmological framing of anthropology becomes apparent from the outset in *Constitution*. The title of its first chapter reveals that—prior to any rigorously anthropological considerations—Gregory is interested in “the nature of the cosmos” (περὶ τοῦ κόσμου φυσιολογία) and “what preceded the creation of the human being” (περὶ τῶν προγεγονότων τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου γενέσεως).²² The chapter itself outlines a complex account of nature, movement, and the universe, presenting in a nutshell what just several months later he developed in *Apology* as a grand cosmological narrative. Specifically, this part of *Constitution* offers a thick, layered, and dynamic depiction of cosmic harmony, which corresponds to the synergetic principle of *Apology*'s view of things.²³ What establishes cosmic harmony, indeed, are God's wisdom and power as well as the

17 PG 44, 124–256. The work is confusingly known as *On the Making of Man* or *On the Creation of Humankind*, titles which reiterate the mistranslation of the original Greek title, *Περὶ κατασκευῆς ἀνθρώπου* (*On the Constitution of the Human Being*), into Latin, *De opificio hominis*. The references indicate the chapter and the column found in PG, followed by the lines found in TLG.

18 So goes Giorgio Maturi, “Op Hom,” in *BDGN*, 543–555.

19 Laplace, “Introduction,” 38.

20 Giulio Maspero, “Anthropology,” in *BDGN*, 37–47.

21 Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, VCSup 46 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 146–147, 158–159, 186, 203–204, 208.

22 *Constitution* 1.128.29–31.

23 Allusions to the principle of synergy are not confined to these two works. He referred to it, implicitly, in *Letter 4: To Eusebius* 4, within a context dealing with Christ's omnipresence and providential activity. See Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 134.

maelstrom of the fundamental elements.²⁴ It is obvious that this cosmological outline emerges at the nexus of theology and science, or natural philosophy. Only after this summary does Gregory turn to discussing biological and anthropological topics.

For Gregory therefore the cosmological account is a necessary prolegomenon to the “mystical anthropogony”²⁵ of Gen 1–2 or, better, a methodological presupposition for considering human nature through the same theological and scientific lenses. Had he clarified how the cosmological summary introduces the anthropological narrative, it would have been useful of course, but we are left without an explanation. He elucidates the matter, implicitly, only in the eighth chapter, where he observes that within human nature are recapitulated all the strands of created reality—mineral, vegetal, animal, and rational.²⁶ Since human nature encapsulates the entire creation, human nature and the cosmos must be considered together. Introducing the anthropological discourse by a chapter on physics and cosmology is therefore the logical way to proceed. Less compellingly, Gregory alludes to his reasons at the end of the very first chapter. There he notes that “the creation in its entirety was rich ... yet the one destined to participate in it was not present.”²⁷ The context deals with creation’s welcoming attitude towards humankind.²⁸ In this setting, the sentence denotes the universe’s incomplete state in the absence of humankind or more precisely the imperfection of a wonderfully crafted world with no one to make sense of it or to find delight in it. The universe is a dwelling which, deprived of humankind, is idle and meaningless. Apart from the very Hellenic as well as scriptural nuance that the beauty of the creation is meant for use and enjoyment,²⁹ the sentence discloses that for Gregory a nonhuman cosmos is unthinkable. So understood, this brief statement concurs with the meaning of the eighth chapter, satisfying the anthropic cosmological principle and, to an extent, the grand narrative of Big History which reverses this logic by showing that no human chronology makes sense without the cosmic backdrop.³⁰ Behind this agreement one might discern the suggestion that cosmological

24 *Constitution* 1.128.32–132.34.

25 τὴν μυστικὴν τοῦ Μωϋσέως ἀνθρωπογονίαν (“Moses’ mystical anthropogony”; *Constitution* 30.256.28–29).

26 *Constitution* 8.144–148.

27 ἅπας ὁ κατὰ τὴν κτίσιν πλοῦτος ... ἀλλ’ ὁ μετέχων οὐκ ἦν (*Constitution* 1.132.32–34).

28 *Constitution* 1.132.3–32.

29 This nuance reappears, clearer, at the end of the next chapter, where we read: “enjoying earthly goods by way of the corresponding sense perception” (*Constitution* 2.133.32–33).

30 See Christian, *Maps of Time*, 79–136; *Origin Story*, 179–280.

awareness is needed in order to grasp the meaning of human existence as much as anthropological awareness rounds up one's worldview.

Gregory's anthropic cast of mind emerges in various other ways throughout the treatise. In what follows I discuss, first, aspects of the relationship between humankind and the cosmos, and then I analyse the image of the king, the palace, and the kingdom. The royal analogy, of interest here, provides an overarching narrative for his thinking.

1.1 *Tensions within the Continuum*

I have already mentioned chapter eight in relation to Gregory's encompassing view that presents humankind and the cosmos as inextricably connected. The chapter is typical for what scholars identify as pivotal to his methodology, namely, the notion of succession, order, or connection of things, ἀκολουθία.³¹ This notion denotes a taxonomical approach to reality.

Divinely established, the order of creation follows a natural pattern that leads from the inanimate to the conscious, progressing through the stages of mineral, vegetal, animal, and intellectual existence.³² Each new level possesses the qualities of the previous one, to which it adds new traits. The last three types of existence are living beings or—as he prefers—different kinds of soul, characterised by varying degrees of participation in sentience and sapience. He explains that the last to arrive, humanity, recapitulates and reconfigures within itself these three types of soul into a higher order: “The human being, this rational animal, combines within itself all those forms of soul.”³³ Gregory's views suggest an evolutionary and transformative process that culminates in the form of humankind.³⁴ Nemesis follows suit with his chain-of-being schema

31 See Gil-Tamayo, “Akolouthia,” 14–20. The concept appears in *Constitution* 2.133.40; 8.145.24; 8.148.20, within contexts relevant to the present analysis.

32 *Constitution* 8.144.55–145.23.

33 Διὰ πάσης γὰρ ιδέας τῶν ψυχῶν κατακρινάται τὸ λογικὸν τοῦτο ζῶον ὁ ἄνθρωπος (*Constitution* 8.145.31–33). The statement echoes Gregory the Theologian's view of the human being as linking the visible and the invisible. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 38.321.37–324.8. For an analysis of the text, see Costache, “Seeking Out,” 235–239. For a comparison between the positions of the two Gregorys, see O'Brien, “Creation,” 11–12. The discourse of the Theologian evokes, in turn, Philo's *Creation* 82. In addition, Nemesis (*On Human Nature* 1.2.13–3.5; 1.4.16–24; 1.5.4–8) observed that human nature encases the fundamental elements too, manifesting within itself the universe's profound unity as one complex creation. We shall soon see that Gregory is not ignorant of this perception.

34 This is a Platonic stance which Gregory must have borrowed from Philo. See Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 417–420. Nellas (*Deification*, 32) redrafts Gregory's evolutionary perspective in the parameters of contemporary scientific culture. As one scholar noted, for Gregory this process continues with the spiritual transformation of humankind. Ene D-Vasilescu, “How

of creation.³⁵ As Laplace discussed, Gregory's reasoning draws on an undisclosed assumption, that in order to recapitulate the earlier layers of existence humankind has to be potentially present in them.³⁶ This assumption corresponds to Paul Davies' conviction "that we human beings are built into the scheme of things in a very basic way."³⁷ The reverse of the coin—to draw upon Eric Perl's insight³⁸—is that for humankind to recapitulate the earlier forms of soul there must be a potential for humanity, or for humanisation, in them. This situation echoes the cosmological circumstances discussed in Chapter Six above, particularly the relation between darkness and light or chaos and order. The light—or order—is present all along in the dark of the chaos as potentiality. When it emerges as the ordered universe, the light is not a new creation, it is the chaos activated. Darkness and light, chaos and cosmos are different facets of the same created reality. It goes the same for humankind and the earlier lifeforms, even the lifeless forms of existence. There is no inherent opposition between our species and the rest of the creation; on the contrary, they presuppose each other. Several paragraphs later, Gregory presents the same perception in a mirror, from the human vantage down to the lower orders of reality.³⁹ There, he points out that taxonomical coherence demands that the human being appear last—at the end of an evolutionary ascent of nature as though through the rungs of a ladder—so that this highest of lifeforms on the earth can summarise the other strands of reality. Both perspectives denote an anthropic way of thinking.

Would Gregory of Nyssa Have Understood Evolutionism?" 151–169; "Gregory of Nyssa," 1077–1078. It was Maximus the Confessor who picked up on Gregory's idea and developed a mystical anthropic transformation of the cosmos. See Costache, "Mapping Reality," 388–390. Stăniloae developed the idea further. See Costache, "Colocviul fără Sfârșit," 201–207.

35 Taking his cue from Gregory, Nemesius proposes an evolutionary explanation of this process. He clarifies that the leap from one level to the next does not happen suddenly. God manages the creation patiently, one step at a time. As previous lifeforms are made of older things so humankind is moulded out of the preexistent biological material. Cf. Nemesius, *On Human Nature* 1.3.13–4.16. The notion of humankind made out of preexistent matter features also in Gregory the Theologian's *Oration* 38.11. See Costache, "Seeking Out," 236–237. A similar chain-of-being schema features in John Philoponus' *On the Creation of the World*. See Mueller-Jourdain, "La question de l'âme," 141–150.

36 Laplace, "Introduction," 37.

37 Davies, *The Mind of God*, 16.

38 Eric D. Perl, "'Every Life Is a Thought': The Analogy of Personhood in Neoplatonism," *Philosophy & Theology* 18:1 (2006): 143–167, esp. 160–163. I am grateful to Adam Cooper for pointing me to this article.

39 *Constitution* 8.148.15–24.

Nevertheless, neither of these two perspectives explains the a priori anthropic conditioning of reality. There is an intrinsic link between human nature and the other levels of existence, true, but to state that this is so because things *have* to advance from simplicity to complexity brings no clarity in the matter. The statement is not completely useless, however, in that it signifies a hierarchically ordered universe.⁴⁰ We shall soon discover the importance of this point.

Gregory attempts another explanation—teleological and utilitarian—that lower strands of reality are meant to serve higher forms of existence.⁴¹ The minerals do not just exist, they are made because of their usefulness to plants. The plants are made because they are useful to the animals. The animals are serviceable to humankind. It is as though he works with a modified version of Fermat's principle that light seeks the best path to its target,⁴² thus describing, long before Chiang, a world whose components are teleologically conditioned.⁴³ Creation's functionality points from one level to the next and all things towards humankind as their goal. This teleological explanation cannot entirely satisfy. Yet, in spite of Gregory's failure to account for the anthropic conditioning of the creation, one cannot miss that something significant is sketched here—the interconnectivity of the entire creation, including humankind, within a continuum that evolves in the parameters of divine wisdom.

Connectivity is not the only word however; inherent tensions perturb the continuum.⁴⁴ Their origin is humankind's status as naturally constituted and divinely moulded or, to paraphrase Adam Cooper, our being naturally human and supernaturally divine.⁴⁵ In short, humankind inherits the many strands of created reality, which it recapitulates within its own nature, but since it is divinely configured it remains irreducible to the universe. Paulos Gregorios showed that for Gregory, indeed, it is the divine image—a reality of a different order from nature—that causes tensions within the creation.⁴⁶

Addressing this matter in the sixteenth chapter, Gregory refers to the aspect of recapitulation together with the ancient motif of the microcosm or “small world.” He mentions certain “foreign” philosophers, very likely the Stoics, who

40 See Tollefsen, “Cosmology,” 178–179.

41 *Constitution* 8.144.36–49.

42 Michal Křížek et al., *17 Lectures on Fermat Numbers: From Number Theory to Geometry* (New York: Springer, 2001), xvi.

43 Chiang, *Stories of Your Life*, 124–126.

44 Laplace, “Introduction,” 36–37. Zachhuber, *Human Nature*, 170–172.

45 Adam G. Cooper, *Naturally Human, Supernaturally God: Deification in Pre-Conciliar Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

46 Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man—The Divine Presence: The Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Paragon House, 1988), 224.

praise the human being's capacity to encompass the nature of the cosmos: "They say that the human being is a small world (μικρὸς κόσμος), consisting of the very elements of the universe (ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν τῷ παντὶ στοιχείων συνεστηκότα)."⁴⁷ Gregory concedes, *pace* Gregorios,⁴⁸ that human nature is microcosmic and that as such it encapsulates created reality. But so does a mouse or a mosquito as well. Concerned with the qualities that make the human being unique within and superior to the creation, he does not agree that the cosmic connection is humankind's title of glory (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον μέγεθος). He prepares his answer by rhetorical questions:

What is so great in considering the human being an imprint and likeness of the cosmos (κόσμου χαρακτήρα καὶ ὁμοίωμα), since the sky keeps circling, the earth changes, and all things which these contain pass away together with the movement of what encompasses them? But, then, in what does the human greatness (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον μέγεθος) lie according to the ecclesiastical teaching? Not in the likeness of the created cosmos (ἐν τῇ πρὸς τὸν κτιστὸν κόσμον ὁμοιότητι), but in being made in the image of the creator's nature (ἐν τῷ κατ' εἰκόνα γενέσθαι τῆς τοῦ κτίσαντος φύσεως).⁴⁹

The passage evokes creation's mortality as discussed in Chapters Four and Five in regard to the thinking of Athanasius and Basil. But what matters is that it does not say that the human being is not a microcosm which recapitulates the universe—sky, earth, and everything within these. This might not be its title of glory, yet the human being is "an imprint and likeness of the cosmos" (κόσμου χαρακτήρα καὶ ὁμοίωμα) nonetheless and so a microcosm that resembles what it consists of, the stuff of the created world (ἐν τῇ πρὸς τὸν κτιστὸν κόσμον ὁμοιότητι). This inference finds support in chapter eight, where Gregory depicts human nature as summarising within itself the various layers of the universe. Humankind, then, is both an image of the cosmos and an image of the divine nature.

47 *Constitution* 16.177.50–52. Many other ancient naturalists used the concept of microcosm, among them Democritus. Cf. Freter, "Democritus on Being," 71.

48 Gregorios (*Cosmic Man*, 15–17, 223–224) believed that Gregory rejected this possibility. For a moderate reiteration of the same position, see Nesteruk, *The Sense of the Universe*, 139 n. 32. But this is not the consensus. For contrary views, see Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation*, 66–67 and Blowers, *Drama*, 357–358. Gregory himself approves of the concept of microcosm in his *Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 3.30.24–26, where he writes: ὅτι μικρὸς τις κόσμος ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος πάντα ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὰ τοῦ μεγάλου κόσμου ("for a small cosmos is the human being, since it has within itself the great cosmos").

49 *Constitution* 16.180.8–15.

To put things into perspective and perhaps to understand why people might find it difficult to accept the human microcosm, one should borrow information from *Apology*. There we discover that Gregory incorporated the Ptolemaic system into his worldview. If one translates the above passage into the language of Ptolemaic cosmography, then it means that within the human being he discerns—interiorised—the macrocosmic hierarchy.⁵⁰ The seven celestial spheres, beyond the orbit of the moon, extending as high as the divine region are not only high above; they are deep within as well. As a microcosm, the human being is the map of the universe. This perspective must have been as overwhelming then as it is for us today. No wonder people's resistance to the idea of humankind as a microcosm. Yet contemporary cosmologists refer to our nature as made of stardust produced in the furnaces of long-dead supernovae. But what matters is that the above excerpt does not deny any of this. It merely emphasises that the impress of the divine image surpasses the anthropologically interiorised hierarchy of the cosmos.

Humankind's iconic condition, the fact of being divinely shaped or "made after the image of the creator's nature" (ἐν τῷ κατ' εἰκόνα γενέσθαι τῆς τοῦ κτίσαντος φύσεως),⁵¹ transcends the cosmos and is irreducible to it. An echo of Christ's words in Mark 8:36 (the value of human life compared to the universe) can be discerned here, but Gregory does not allude to this verse. The passage under consideration means therefore that, although the universe is open to God and is prodigiously fertile, the microcosmic recapitulation of the world does not account for human uniqueness. Let me explain.

Not unlike David Bohm's "implicate order" present in any grains of matter,⁵² a holistic worldview such as Gregory's postulates that all things recapitulate all things. What distinguishes the human being from any other microcosmic or recapitulative structures, whether mosquitoes or mice, is its affinity with the divine sphere. Bodily uprightness, which incidentally is a topic long discussed by Plato and Philo,⁵³ denotes this affinity. In his words, which echo Clement, Origen, and Basil's views discussed in Chapters Three and Five, "the form of the human being is upright, stretching out towards the heaven and gazing

50 *Apology* 72.20.

51 *Constitution* 16.180.14–15. As Cooper (*Naturally Human*, 173) pointed out, for Gregory the divine image refers to each human person and to humankind as a whole. For a synthesis of the patristic views of the "image," see Louth, "The Fathers on Genesis," 572–573.

52 David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), 177–271.

53 Plato, *Timaeus* 90a. Philo, *De plantatione* 18. I am grateful to David Runia for this point and the two references.

upwards.”⁵⁴ Physical uprightness marks a radical difference from the cosmos. It signifies the transcendence of the human being to all things ephemeral and moving—from the sky that ever circles to the earth changing to the passing away of all things earthly and celestial. It denotes humankind’s calling to soar towards God. However, if uprightness is a bodily manifestation of the fact of being made in God’s image—and at this juncture Gregory goes beyond Philo’s views⁵⁵—it may denote a teleological or eschatological dimension as well. Panayiotis Nellas suggested that in Gregory’s interpretation the iconic condition, or the divine image, points to humanity’s eschatological glory.⁵⁶ Whether transcendent or eschatological, or both, humankind’s iconic or divinely shaped condition is irreducible to our natural structure and cosmic range. Hence the tension within the spacetime continuum.

Affirming humankind’s irreducibility to its microcosmic status does not mean that Gregory dismisses the taxonomical lineage earlier outlined. On the contrary, indirectly in the above passage and clearly in the eighth chapter, he affirms that the various levels of reality are present within human nature. But the excerpt under consideration highlights the existence of another level, the divine imprint. While even grains of sand and the elementary particles—not just mosquitoes, mice, and people—are genuine microcosmic structures, what marks human uniqueness within the created continuum is the divine image. Thus, unlike the created universe and its own transitory and mortal nature, the human being shares with God a feature unmatched by anything else within the visible creation. It is the likeness of the divine nature, elsewhere understood, as we shall soon discover, as sovereignty, virtue, and immortality.

Affirming human uniqueness, therefore, is one of Gregory’s main concerns, which explains his tireless return to the theological dimension of the divine image. Immediately relevant is that the complex architecture of the human being—displaying animal and divine features—causes a double tension. First, a tension within itself, since the imprint of the image, amounting to a divine mode of existence, is irreducible to human nature.⁵⁷ Second, a tension between

54 “Ὅρθιον δὲ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τὸ σχῆμα, καὶ πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνατείνεται, καὶ ἄνω βλέπει (*Constitution* 8.144.14–15). Basil (*Hexaemeron* 9.2.31–47) had written something similar, though not as poetical as Gregory’s line.

55 I am grateful to David Runia for this insight.

56 Nellas, *Deification*, 30.

57 Nellas (*Deification*, 30, 33, 37, 41) and Yannaras (*Elements of Faith*, 62–65) exploited well this dimension of Gregory’s anthropology. In turn, Cooper (*Naturally Human*, 199–200) noted that the fall, or human sinfulness more generally, deepened the internal tension between the divine image and human nature by clothing the latter in the “garments of skin.”

itself and the cosmos, since humankind possesses a feature irreducible to the cosmic chain of being. The sixteenth chapter grapples with these very issues. So does, likewise, the eighteenth chapter, where we read that, given humankind's recapitulation of other lifeforms, within its nature are present brutish impulses which in no way relate to the divine image.⁵⁸ This tension has ethical and existential repercussions. While sin—an inclination towards the brute side—emphasises the animal and therefore the natural dimension of human constitution, virtue—the rational transformation of base instincts into elevated drives—manifests the human being's noble affinity with the divine.⁵⁹ These nuances play a crucial role in Gregory's construct of human sovereignty.

In short, the tensions caused by humankind's double relation with the created and the uncreated poles of existence reveal continuities as well as discontinuities between our race and the cosmos. This is the source of an entire dialectic of humankind's relation with the creation, which Gregory interprets, as we see immediately below, in regard to sovereignty, a hallmark of being in God's image.

1.2 *Human Sovereignty*

I have shown above that for Gregory human dignity does not overlap with our race's microcosmic dimension or its natural relationship with the universe. Being made of stardust is not humankind's highest glory. Human uniqueness draws on the divine image, whose dialectical relation with human nature he treated at length. In what follows I focus on his equation of the divine image with sovereignty or royalty (βασιλεία).⁶⁰ This nuance does not exhaust what he has to say about God's imprint within us. As to the view of image as royalty, Elaine Pagels observed that he borrows it from the rabbinic tradition. The latter represented the human being as a created king made in the image of the uncreated king.⁶¹

In the fourth chapter, Gregory continues to argue for the superiority of the human being to the rest of the creation. He notes that God decided the making of the human being in God's image and as a sovereign (ἡγεμονεύς) of the earth's ecosystem.⁶² From then on and for a number of chapters, ending

58 *Constitution* 18.192.1–27.

59 *Constitution* 18.193.10–48.

60 Ilaria Ramelli, "Good / Beauty," in *BDGN*, 356–363, esp. 360.

61 Elaine Pagels, "The Politics of Paradise: Augustine's Exegesis of Genesis 1–3 versus that of John Chrysostom," *HTR* 78:1–2 (1985): 67–99, esp. 67–68.

62 *Constitution* 3.133.37–54. On the human hegemony over the earthly ecosystem, see Hans Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach*, OECs

with the twelfth, Gregory returns time and again to the topics of superiority, uniqueness, and hegemony. While in the fourth chapter he draws a line between humankind—whose creation was preceded by a divine council that defined its mode of existence and activity—and the cosmos—which, according to the text, did not require such a definition—afterwards he outlines a series of natural proofs of human sovereignty.

In the fifth chapter he states that “the bearing of the body,” its erect posture, signifies royalty.⁶³ Physical uprightness appears as an extension of the inner sovereignty, equally obvious to his eyes. It refers to the nobility of the soul, the ruler of the body which, being free, has no one to rule over it.⁶⁴ In short, being “made in the image of the nature that rules over all”⁶⁵ and also endowed with “likeness to the king of the universe,”⁶⁶ humankind is royal, too. The human being manifests this status when, “clothed in virtue,” becomes “adorned with the crown of righteousness,” which, gesturing to the eschatological interpretation of the divine image, anticipates the “beatitude of immortality.”⁶⁷ It emerges that Gregory articulates human sovereignty at the nexus of the divine archetype, the autarchy of the soul, the bipedal posture of the body, and the ethical and existential aspects of virtue, righteousness, and immortality. He returns to some of these particulars of human sovereignty, namely, the ethical and the existential aspects, in the sixth chapter, where he addresses the correspondence between God and God’s created reflection, the human being. The ethical aspect originates in the creator who, like a painter, adds to the human being godlike colours—read virtues—such as “purity, dispassion, beatitude,

(Oxford University Press, 2013), 102, 153–155. See also Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49.

63 ἐπιτηδείως πρὸς βασιλείαν ἔχειν (“being serviceable to royalty”; *Constitution* 4.136.22). We already know that Gregory returns to the uprightness of the human body as marking nobility and dignity in *Constitution* 8.144.14–27.

64 Human hegemony does not refer only to a capacity to rule over the earth’s ecosystem. It means, first and foremost, a capacity to rule itself, to be free of all necessity and instinctual drive, to live virtuously. A number of scholars discussed this matter. Blowers, *Drama*, 358. Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 153. Cyril Hovorun, “Two Meanings of Freedom in Eastern Patristic Tradition,” in *Quests for Freedom: Biblical—Historical—Contemporary*, ed. Michael Welker (Göttingen: Neukirchener Theologie, 2015), 133–144, esp. 137–138, 143. Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 173, 187. Nellas, *Deification*, 26, 97–98. Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation*, 70–71.

65 τὸ τῆς δυναστευούσης τῶν πάντων φύσεως εἰκόνα γενέσθαι (*Constitution* 4.136.28–29). The expression is a variant of ἐν τῷ κατ’ εἰκόνα γενέσθαι τῆς τοῦ κτίσαντος φύσεως, in *Constitution* 16.180.8–15, earlier discussed.

66 διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα τοῦ παντός ὁμοιότητος (*Constitution* 4.136.37–38).

67 *Constitution* 4.136.40–49. Ilaria Ramelli, “Methodius,” in *BDGN*, 494–496, esp. 495. Harrison, *The Bible*, 209.

and separation from all evil.”⁶⁸ There are also existential correspondences. God is mind, people can think; God is Word, people can speak; God is omniscient, people enquire in order to know; God is love, the disciples of the Lord are called to love, too.⁶⁹

The evidence in favour of human sovereignty and superiority notwithstanding, Gregory had to grapple with a difficulty. The ostensible weaknesses of humankind, compared to the attributes of other lifeforms, contradict the foregoing proofs. Various animals possess mighty features such as speed, physical force, acuity of sense, quickness of instinct, and weapons of defence. Human nature has none of these. It is frail and defenceless. On what could the claim of royalty be founded then? The only way to maintain a sense of human superiority and sovereignty is by highlighting the capacity to use certain animals for our own good. This is indeed the road Gregory takes, though not without a caveat. Humankind does not rule as an absolute monarch. Its hegemony works through an ability to cooperate with the rest of the creation, first by taming some of its parts and then by industriously making use of the beneficial qualities of the animals, plants, and the mineral world.⁷⁰

So far we have discovered that the topic of human sovereignty relates to the tension addressed in the previous section. We are suspended between the divine and the natural world. Being created in God's image, human beings remain irreducible to their own created nature and to the universe where that nature belongs. Within the group of chapters analysed here, the divine image amounts to royalty. The latter, in turn, denotes uniqueness within the created domain as well as a way of interacting with it. This solution resembles *Diognetus'* depiction of the Christian activity in the world—discussed in Chapter One above—and is thus anchored in an earlier way of thinking. Considering the above, the tension does not result in the isolation of our race from the rest of the created world. It is therefore possible that in referring to this tension Gregory pursues another goal, namely, to sketch a complex hierarchical schema of the created continuum whose topmost layer is the human being—a layer that nevertheless remains inseparable from the whole. The continuum is not broken by the affirmation of human uniqueness and sovereignty; it is structured by

68 *Constitution* 5.137.1–23. The same idea appears later in Diadochus (*Texts* 89.7–13, 29–34).

69 *Constitution* 5.137.25–44.

70 *Constitution* 7.140.49–144.9. Jame Schaefer, *Patristics and Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 197. Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation*, 77–78. Less developed, the usefulness of other lifeforms to humankind features also in Nemesius (*On Human Nature* 1.4.24–5.4).

it. And although this part of the argument is not directly relevant to anthropic cosmology, its input is not altogether negligible.

Human sovereignty directly links with Gregory's anthropic worldview rendered by way of an image—of the king, the palace, and the kingdom—to which I must now turn.

1.3 *The King, the Palace, and the Kingdom*

Ever concerned with the affirmation of human uniqueness and superiority within creation's wide array, already in the second chapter Gregory addresses the challenging matter of humankind's late arrival on the cosmic scene. He does so virtually in the words of Philo.⁷¹ The fact that he spells out this issue right after the cosmological prolegomenon points to what must have been his main interest, humanity's place in the grand schema of things. But we do not know his true reasons. As usual, he offers no clarification in this regard. Some of his reasons might coincide however with those discerned in *Apology*. There, he discusses natural and cosmological phenomena in regard to some logical lacunae in the scriptural account. It is possible that in *Constitution* he intends, similarly, to rule out doubts concerning scriptural anthropology, such as humankind's late arrival.

To grasp the issue at hand one should consider it against Gregory's contemporary culture, which set a premium on antiquity. The older something was, the more venerable. This axiom received a classical formulation in the Hesiodic myth of the golden age⁷² which determined that the noblest things came first, being followed by the increasingly worse. The critics of Christianity's recentness often invoked this cultural norm. Chronologically assessed, Christianity lacked nobility and wisdom. Interestingly, the early Christian apologists retorted by drawing on the same cultural norm in order to affirm that Christian faith actually precedes all wisdom. The statement is bold, expressing the theological conviction that Christianity's origin is the divine Logos, a source that antedates any other.⁷³ Gregory appears to adopt a similar thinking. It is not difficult to imagine that some—possibly Christian intellectuals as well as pagan critics—interpreted Genesis through the lens of ancient wisdom as depicting an imperfect humankind, both last and least in the order of creation. Was humanity's later making not a sign of inferiority to earlier creations? For the purposes of affirming human superiority, in the second chapter Gregory offers

71 Philo, *Creation* 77–88. Laplace ("Introduction," 38–39) identified further Platonic echoes of this approach.

72 Hesiod, *Works and Days* 106–201.

73 Costache, "Meaningful Cosmos," 124–126. Norris, "The apologists," 36, 39.

two analogies: the guest at a banquet and the king, the palace, and the kingdom. Both convey the same message—which anticipates anthropic cosmology and the Big History narrative—that propitious conditions were set before humankind's arrival in the world and that humankind's saga dovetails with the parameters and the destiny of the universe. Moreover, everything in the universe conspires towards the existence of humankind. So understood, the recent arrival of our species denotes uniqueness and dignity.

The analogy of the banquet and the guest⁷⁴ brings this message to the fore by outlining how a discerning, good, and generous host first decorates the hall, then provides the food and the drinks, and finally welcomes the guest of honour. In like manner, first of all God brought the world into being, making it a pleasant abode, beautifully adorned, a genuine cornucopia (already suggested by the portrayal of God as a “rich and extravagant host”).⁷⁵ Only after that was humanity brought about in this world. Viewed through the lens of the anthropic principle, the image signifies that the creator conditions the cosmos for the arrival of humankind, all things being configured to be useful to our species. The description of the world as a house corresponds to the earlier one, in *Constitution's* first chapter.⁷⁶ At the end of the analogy Gregory mentions again the duality of the human architecture—its divine and created dimensions—by which the human being participates in the best of the two realms.⁷⁷ Here, the tension inbuilt into the human being's twofold structure is bypassed in an attempt to show that all of reality welcomes humankind.

The analogy with which the second chapter begins, of the king, the palace, and the kingdom, is the most relevant to my purposes. Here is the passage in its full length:

This great and precious thing, the human person, had not taken yet its place in the world of beings. It is not appropriate for the ruler to be revealed before that which had to be ruled over. However, as the creator of the universe prepared beforehand a royal palace of sorts (τινα βασιλειον) for the one who would be king in the future (τῷ μέλλοντι βασιλεύειν), now it was appropriate for the ruler (βασιλεύοντα) to be revealed; the royal domains (βασιλείαις) were now established. The (latter) consisted of the earth, the islands, the sea, and the sky arched, after a manner, like a roof over all these. Great wealth was stored in the treasuries (of the palace). By

74 *Constitution* 2.133.16–33. Philo already used this motif in *Creation* 78.

75 *Constitution* 2.133.22–23.

76 *Constitution* 1.132.3–32.

77 *Constitution* 2.133.26–33.

wealth I mean the whole of the creation (πάσαν τὴν κτίσιν), such as plants and their offshoots, together with many animals endowed with sense, breath, and life. And if we must count as wealth material things, (we have to include) the pleasing things which seem worthwhile to human eyes, such as gold, silver, and the gems that people (so much) love. All these have been discretely stored, but generously, in the bosom of the earth as though in royal treasuries. Only then (when all was ready) was the human being revealed to the world, to behold the wonders therein and to be their lord. Through enjoying the beauty and majesty of the visible things, (the human overlord was given an opportunity to) become aware of the (divine) giver and to grasp the ineffable power of the creator, who transcends all understanding. It is for this reason that the human being was introduced last, after the (whole of the) creation, not thrown away at the end like a worthless thing, but as one to whom it belongs by birth to be the king of his subjects.⁷⁸

The excerpt summarises the first two chapters of Genesis by likening the universe, sky and earth, to the domains of a paradisiac kingdom (βασιλῆιοι) and a royal palace (βασιλεῖον), the beautifully outfitted home of humanity and the other lifeforms. That the passage refers to the universe or the creation in its entirety (πάσα ἡ κτίσις)⁷⁹ and not only the plants and the animals of the earthly ecosystem becomes clearer several paragraphs later. There, echoing an approach encountered as early as the Disciple's list,⁸⁰ Gregory makes a more comprehensive inventory of the creation. The universe includes "every thing and all things (τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον πάντα) that have been brought into being by reason (πάντα λόγῳ πρὸς γένεσιν ἄγεται), that is ether, stars, the air in between, the sea, the earth, animals, and plants,"⁸¹ together with the one creation whose making required a divine council, namely, the sovereign being, the human person.⁸²

78 *Constitution* 2.132.37–133.16. Here, Gregory borrows from Philo (*Creation* 83–86). There are some differences between their renditions. Gregory depicts the universe as welcoming, which presupposes familiarity between the king and the beings over which he rules. Philo prefers a rigorous cosmographical approach, which states upfront that the human being was appointed sovereign of the sublunar domain: τῶν ὑπὸ σελήνην ἀπάντων βασιλέα (*Creation* 84).

79 "The whole of the creation" (*Constitution* 2.132.47).

80 *Diognetus* 7.2.

81 *Constitution* 3.136.3–5. The reference to all things made by reason (πάντα λόγῳ πρὸς γένεσιν ἄγεται) finds an echo in Gregory's matter-making theory (πάν τὸ γινόμενον, λόγῳ γίνεται) discussed in Chapter Six. Cf. *Apology* 10.2–6.

82 *Constitution* 3.133.41–22, 47–50.

In the passage here considered, however, Gregory's purpose is not to draw a rigorous map of the universe. It is, I believe, to depict the cosmos as paradisiacal and royal by combining the creation narrative of Gen 1 and the garden narrative of Gen 2, and by rewriting them. What results is a story of the world produced through divinely guided processes that culminate with its fashioning into a bountiful place and a kingly abode. Basil, we discovered in Chapter Five, arrived at a similar conclusion by drawing on a different image, the paradise as an eschatological capital city in Rev 21–22. His view must have influenced Gregory who, after all, wrote *Constitution* in order to continue the anthropological discourse from the point where his brother left it. Above all, what prompts Gregory to visualise the paradise as a kingly palace (βασιλειον) is undoubtedly the scriptural notion (Gen 1:26–29; 2:15, 19–20) of humankind's sovereignty (cf. τῷ μέλλοντι βασιλεύειν and βασιλεύοντα). This perception finds support in his assessment of the annual celebration of Christ's resurrection as the “universal feast of creation” which commemorates the restoration of all to a royal state.⁸³ It is against the backdrop of this scriptural and liturgical synthesis that Gregory introduces Philo's image of the king, the palace, and the royal domain. To this analogy I must now turn.

Gregory's story mentions the sky arched above the heads of the king and his subjects like a roof of a house which shelters all of them.⁸⁴ Hierarchy aside, ruler and ruled belong to one kingdom, one royal home, one homogenous creation. The continuum is once again affirmed, but not as directly as elsewhere. The fact of the matter is that the profound anthropic connections earlier outlined are not explicit within this otherwise beautiful passage. No word here about the gradual process that led from the mineral to the vegetal to the animal to the human existence. No word about the ontological solidarity between humankind's biological constitution, the earth's ecosystem, and the universe or the recapitulation of the creation within the human microcosm. Here, the earthly ecosystem and its celestial roof are the background of a story—the theological journey humankind must undertake—not its main characters. That said, an anthropic suggestion can be traced in that all things were made in view of humanity's emergence at some point within cosmic history. The palace was built for the king.

In turn, humankind's consubstantiality with the universe, discussed above, makes room here for the universe's connection with God, together with the link between humankind and God. Created beings are indeed serviceable to

83 Letter 31: *To Letoïus* 1b, in Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 214–215.

84 The view of the sky as a roof of the world features also in Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 2.13.8–10. See a brief discussion about this passage in Blowers, *Drama*, 111.

humankind, providing the necessary means for its existence and wellbeing. But the passage also emphasises another aspect of their functionality. As with Origen and Basil's cosmic school, they point towards God, inviting our race to look up and around in search for the divine giver—far beyond the stars and above all earthly thought.⁸⁵

Gregory discusses again this matter in *Apology*, where he shows the way Scripture guides natural contemplation.⁸⁶ In so framing the analogy, he means that humankind is supposed to live not only by eating, but also by seeking the divine fellowship and wisdom. While delighting in the universe's order, beauty, and usefulness, humanity must trace God's power and wisdom in the creation and thus know the maker. As we know, he emphasises the cosmic marks of God's power and wisdom even more in *Apology*. The undisclosed assumption of this train of thought—which he openly addresses in *Apology*—is that the created beings are accretions of intelligible qualities and divine thoughts, and so divinely grounded. What we learnt in Chapter Six about Gregory's theory of matter explains why for him both the earth's milieu and the cosmos at large point towards God. In turn, his thoughts on the divine image, which echo Athanasius' *Gentiles* 2, explain why humankind can relate with God. In this light, the restricted connection between humankind and the cosmos in the royal analogy finds an important complement in humankind's task to contemplate the creation in search for the creator. In other words, albeit indirectly the passage under consideration says something significant about Gregory's idea of natural contemplation. Of equal importance, here, is creation's capacity to point humanity godwards given its fundamental link with the divine.

The analogy of the king, the palace, and the kingdom might be incomplete from the viewpoint of my interests, but it plays an important role in Gregory's discourse—answering a particular question and so having a particular function in the author's line of thought. It highlights the uniqueness of humankind within the cosmos and makes possible further developments regarding the link between our race and the universe. It highlights the contemplative relation between humankind and the cosmos, echoing the great tradition of natural contemplation discussed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. Either way, taken together with the broader context of *Constitution* and the contemplative approach, the royal analogy does not allow for anthropocentric inferences, as a modern reader might understand this passage. Human sovereignty here

85 Theokritoff (*Living in God's Creation*, 69) emphasises this double usefulness of the creation.

86 *Apology* 8.17.2–7.

does not mean abusive tyranny. The creation is a dignified royal home. It moreover is a meaningful context for a humankind called to exercise its royalty in the wise management of the world and by interpreting it as a pointer to the creator. Gregory's analogy corresponds to Origen and Basil's cosmic school.

Before proceeding any further, we must determine what kind of anthropic thinking does Gregory's views illustrate. I would propose that, by and large, it would be the weak formulation of the principle, which establishes a connection between the human existence and the universe's big numbers. It also denotes a modified version of the teleological principle, signified by his intuition that the lower ranks of universe's ontological hierarchy point towards humankind.

I must now turn to the contributions of John Chrysostom, who creatively reconfigured most of these stances and whose interpretive commitment to Genesis led, I believe, to a better articulation of the royal analogy in anthropic terms.

2 John Chrysostom

My following analysis focuses on three of John's *Homilies on Genesis*, the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth,⁸⁷ all of which primarily deal with the topic of humankind made in God's image. It is within this context that he introduced a reworked version of the anthropic analogy of the king and the palace. For this reason, before the analogy proper I must discuss his representation of the divine image in the relevant homilies as the necessary background for this image. But, before that, a brief introduction to the text is in order.

Scholars believe that John offered most of these sixty-seven homilies during the lenten season of one year.⁸⁸ And while there is disagreement among them regarding what year that may have been,⁸⁹ most of them agree that the homilies

87 For the in-text references I adopt Hill's subdivisions. When I deal with the original text, I refer, in footnotes, to the number of the homily, the column(s) in PG 53, and the line(s) in TLG.

88 A.M. Malingrey and S. Zincone, "Giovanni Crisostomo," in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane F–O*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, second edn (Genova and Milano: Marietti, 2007), 2216–2224, esp. 2220. Robert C. Hill, "Introduction," in *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. R.C. Hill, FC 74 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 1–19, esp. 8.

89 Kannengiesser (*Handbook*, 278) suggests 386 for the sermons and 388 for the homilies. Malingrey and Zincone ("Crisostomo," 2220) ascertain the year 388 as a date for the publication of the homilies. Stylianos Papadopoulos, *Πατρολογία*, vol. 3: *Ὁ πέμπτος αἰώνας* (Ἀνα-

were a development of the earlier series of nine *Sermons on Genesis*.⁹⁰ Relevant to my purposes is the consensus about the delivery of the homilies in Lent,⁹¹ a consensus based on the author's innumerable references to fasting. The lenten framework led him to discern implications of the analogy that escaped Gregory, such as the import of the ascetically achieved virtue for understanding human sovereignty. At any rate, as Wendy Mayer recently posited, this emphasis on virtue corresponds to John's profile as a physician of souls.⁹²

2.1 *The Divine Image as Sovereignty*

When he addresses humankind's making in the image and likeness of God, John refers, following Philo⁹³ and Gregory,⁹⁴ to an aptitude for control, command, or sovereignty. One scholar noticed that *Genesis* is not the only place where he adopts this stance.⁹⁵ Given the lenten framework he links this aptitude, interiorised, with the ascetic practice of restraint which, when properly managed, leads to personal transformation. The main outcome of this process is gentleness. The acquisition of gentleness is, in turn, Lent's very purpose. He points this out metaphorically in *Genesis* 8.14, saying: "it is for this rea-

τολή καὶ Δύση) (Athens: Gregory, 2010), 153, date the sermons in 386 and the homilies in 389. Quasten (*Patrology*, 3:434) refers to 386 as the year when the homilies were delivered. Hill ("Introduction," 5–6) dates the homilies between 385 and 387; at 8 he allows for the years in Antioch, before 398. Isabella Sandwell ("How to Teach Genesis 1.1–19: John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea on the Creation of the World," *J ECS* 19:4 (2011): 539–564, esp. 540, 541 n. 4) affirms that the attribution of the homilies to 388 is uncertain, allowing for a late delivery, in Constantinople. Given the reference to anthropomorphism and the implicit endorsement of the position of the Tall Brothers, exiled from Egypt, in *Genesis* 8.6–8, I believe that in their present form the homilies have been either offered or redacted in Constantinople, after 401, when the Tall Brothers sought Chrysostom's protection there. See my note, "Revisiting the Date of Chrysostom's *Homilies on Genesis*," *JTS* 68:2 (2017): 621–624.

90 Walter A. Markowicz, "Chrysostom's Sermons on Genesis: A Problem," *TS* 24:4 (1963): 652–664, esp. 654–655. In turn, Kannengiesser (*Handbook*, 784) emphasised that the two series have different objectives. The sermons focus on Gen 1–3, while the homilies address Genesis in its entirety. It seems that Kannengiesser borrowed the observation of Quasten (*Patrology*, 3:434). See also Hill, "Introduction," 1, 4–5.

91 Hill, "Introduction," 5, 11. Rosa Hunt, "Reading Genesis with the Church Fathers: Metaphors of Creation in John Chrysostom's *Homilies on Genesis*," *JES* 12:2 (2012): 21–33, esp. 22–23. Sandwell, "How to Teach Genesis," 540. In turn, Quasten (*Patrology*, 3:434) acknowledged the lenten framework only for the sermons, not for the homilies.

92 Wendy Mayer, "John Chrysostom: Moral Philosopher and Physician of the Soul," in *John Chrysostom: Past, Present, Future*, 193–215, esp. 199–200.

93 Philo, *Creation* 69; 88.

94 *Constitution* 3.133:37–54.

95 Pagels, "Politics," 69.

son that one undertakes abstinence from food, to bridle the spirited mood of the flesh and so bring the horse to gentleness.”⁹⁶ The untamed horse stands for the unenlightened realm of the subconscious, the source of people’s passionate attachments and vices. At the other end of the inner horse—bound by instinct and irrationality—gentleness and kindness embody human self-mastery and sovereignty. What determined John to praise asceticism is his conviction that the human being must transcend its limitations and shortcomings through ascesis, reshaping, and education.⁹⁷ This calling ultimately relate to humankind’s divinely appointed destiny.

Asceticism does not work separately from the theological dimension of Lent, understood as a return to God and the divine life. This dimension is liturgically marked by reading Genesis from the first lenten week onwards. Within the lenten context, the transformation of life takes the form of a theological advancement between the scriptural termini of Genesis 1:26, namely, from image to likeness. Against this backdrop, the human being, already configured after God’s image, is called to progress towards godlikeness, a goal achieved through ascetic endeavours. There is nothing speculative about this process. In concrete and unambiguous terms, in *Genesis* 9:7 “image” amounts to sovereignty (ἀρχή), “likeness” emulating God’s virtue and gentleness. In John’s words,

While “image” refers to a similar power to rule (namely, similar to God’s own), “likeness” is to become like God as much as humanly possible, that is to be assimilated to God in kindness and gentleness, and in regard to the principle of virtue.⁹⁸

This excerpt deserves our attention. John associates the remoulding of life with being “like God” rather than “in God’s image.” By contrast, Gregory consistently interprets the divine image as the person’s potential freedom from the irrationality of the passions, actualised through the virtues. The differ-

96 PG 53, 74.25–27. Later, in *Genesis* 9.14, Christians are called to keep the wild passions under control, fasting being an excellent opportunity to do so. The conviction that the human being is by nature able to cultivate virtue permeates the homilies. See Benjamin J. Dunning, “Chrysostom’s Serpent: Animality and Gender in the *Homilies on Genesis*,” *JCS* 23:1 (2015): 71–95, esp. 76–77.

97 See Theodore Michael Christou, “Raising an Athlete for Christ: Saint John Chrysostom and Education in Byzantium,” *Akropolis* 2 (2018): 105–118, esp. 109–116.

98 “Ὡςπερ Εἰκόνα εἶπε τὴν τῆς ἀρχῆς δηλῶν εἰκόνα, οὕτω καὶ Ὁμοίωσιν, ὥστε κατὰ δύναμιν ἀνθρωπίνην ὁμοίους ἡμᾶς γίνεσθαι Θεῷ, κατὰ τὸ ἡμέρον λέγω καὶ πρᾶον ἐξομοιοῦσθαι αὐτῷ, καὶ κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀρετῆς λόγον (Genesis 9.78.21–24).

ence is primarily terminological, residing in their respective understandings of image and likeness. While in Gregory image and likeness overlap, for John they are distinct.⁹⁹ Accordingly, the above excerpt suggests that the content of the image—the given of sovereignty—reaches concreteness as likeness through the praxis of virtue. True, literally he refers to distinct matters—presenting image as sovereignty and likeness as gentleness—but the relation between them is unmistakable. The capacity for sovereignty pertaining to the image amounts to an aptitude for ascetic restraint, which conditions the attainment of gentleness in resemblance to God. Gentleness is the true form of sovereignty therefore, the way that likeness is the true form of the image. (At times he states this indirectly, as in *Genesis* 9.6, discussed below.) In this light, apart from what has been noted, John's views do not significantly differ from Gregory's. Both shared the conviction that the theological dimension of human existence requires the attainment of virtue by way of ascetic efforts. Asceticism features more prominently however in John's discourse.

A more marked difference between the two theologians refers to the meaning of the divine image as sovereignty. Gregory understands the image as humankind's rule over the world. In turn, John views it foremost as self-restraint or the capacity to rule over one's own being. In the above passage sovereignty amounts to gentleness, which means, as Pagels pointed out, freedom from base impulses.¹⁰⁰ Until recently, this understanding of the divine image was unfamiliar to the western reader. Harrison acknowledged that John's view of sovereignty as gentleness is totally opposite to its modern sense as a divine right to exploit the world.¹⁰¹ Driven by his interest in highlighting this contrast, Harrison passed over in silence any other nuances of sovereignty. For we shall discover below that gentleness, or mildness, is not the only sense of sovereignty in *Genesis*.

John was aware of the difficulties this interiorised interpretation of sovereignty could pose to a less able reader of his time. And so, to preempt the shock, in *Genesis* 9.7 he introduces this view by comparing the spiritual sense of mildness and the literal meaning of reigning over the animals. He posits that just as many animals live on the earth, some of which remain wild, while others are domesticated through human agency, so within the dark recesses of the

99 See Pak-Wah Lai, "The *Imago Dei* and Salvation among the Antiochenes: A Comparison of John Chrysostom with Theodore of Mopsuestia," *SP* 67:15 (2013): 393–402, esp. 396.

100 Pagels, "Politics," 75.

101 Peter Harrison, "Having Dominion: Genesis and the Mastery of Nature," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives—Past and Present*, ed. R.J. Berry (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2006), 17–31, esp. 19–20.

soul lurk wild impulses.¹⁰² Strenuous people tame these “wilder and fiercer” impulses by way of ascetic undertakings; they “must control and overcome and subject them to the (mind’s) rule by way of reasoning (τῷ λογισμῷ τὴν ἀρχήν).”¹⁰³ This advice corresponds to his view of health as inner control and balance.¹⁰⁴ He returns to this topic several lines later by pointing out that as people subdue lions by taming their soul, they should be able to transform their own “wildness of thinking” (λογισμοῦ θηριωδία) into gentleness (ἡμερότης).¹⁰⁵ The human being is therefore appointed ruler of both the inner and the outer universes.

On this note, I turn to the next step of the analysis, the understanding of the “image of God” as empowerment of the human being to control the environment. Before moving on and as a curiosity I must point out that, in attempting to prove the aptitude for inner control from the external exploit of taming nature, John adopted a different strategy from the monastic milieu of the time. For the latter, one could tame the environment only after subduing one’s own nature.¹⁰⁶ John reversed this order, possibly, because he was not talking to an ascetically minded audience.

2.2 *The Divine Image as Overlordship*

In *Genesis* 9.6, John restates the conclusion of his previous homily that “in the image” does not mean physical shape and that, in turn, it refers to conformity to God in relation to “the principle of command” or capacity to rule. This is what the scriptural postscript “so that they rule over the fish of the sea” (Gen 1:26)

¹⁰² *Genesis* 9.78.26–31. The full text reads: “The way in this wide and open land (ἐν τῇ πλατείᾳ τᾷ τῇ γῇ καὶ εὐρυχώρῳ) of animals some are mild and some wild, so within the expanse of our soul (ἐν τῷ πλάτει τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς ἡμετέρας) some thoughts are more irrational and beastly, and some wilder and fiercer.” An echo from Origen’s treatment of cosmology and anthropology in *Homily* seems to be discernible here. See Chapter Three.

¹⁰³ *Genesis* 9.78.31–32. The statement is of Platonic resonance. For John’s fondness for Platonic images, see Constantine Bosinis, “Two Platonic Images in the Rhetoric of John Chrysostom: ‘The Wings of Love’ and ‘the Charioteer of the Soul,’” *SP* 41 (2006): 433–438, and Christou, “Raising an Athlete,” 112–113.

¹⁰⁴ Mayer, “Chrysostom,” 200–201. By establishing a relation between the rational and irrational sides, John’s views do not correspond to the modern dichotomy of reason and nature or mind and body. For a useful analysis of this dichotomy in modern culture, see Perl, “The Analogy of Personhood,” 144–145.

¹⁰⁵ *Genesis* 9.78.34–46. It is likely that at this juncture John paraphrases for his less philosophically inclined reader the better known paragraph in Gregory the Theologian’s *Oration* 38.11, mentioned above, which presents the human being as a combined world where converge the intelligible and the sensible aspects of created reality.

¹⁰⁶ I dealt with this matter elsewhere. See “Adam’s Holiness,” 337–339; “John Moschus,” 21–34. The ascetic tradition offers therefore the solution to the “*ontological revolution*” demanded by Perl, “The Analogy of Personhood,” 162–163.

means.¹⁰⁷ In this context, sovereignty no longer refers to abstinence and its outcome, gentleness. It denotes overlordship, the power to reign over “everything on earth.”¹⁰⁸ Several paragraphs later, in *Genesis* 9.8 (and again in *Genesis* 14.19–21 and 15.4–5), he affirms that the naming of the animals at Gen 2:18–20 proves that human authority is real. Its closest cultural analogy is the naming of the slaves by their masters.¹⁰⁹ Later still, in *Genesis* 10.7, he asserts that the second mention of the power to rule over the animal kingdom—at Gen 1:28—confirms that this is the content of the divine image and thus humankind’s duty. What matters is the conclusion, drawn in *Genesis* 10.8, that the creation narrative “uses the term ‘image’ to signify that (humankind) has control (ἄρχειν) and that all created beings are its subjects (ὑποτεταγμένα).”¹¹⁰ Several paragraphs later, in *Genesis* 10.9, he returns to this conclusion by showing that “in the image” marks the specific difference between people and the animals. While they share in the biological imperative to increase and multiply, it is humankind made in God’s image, not the animals, that is blessed with authority and control.

One may wonder why John returns so persistently to the theme of human overlordship. The reason transpires through his reference, in *Genesis* 9.7, to the criticism which some people levelled at Scripture that—as a sign of their powerlessness—it is humans who fear the animals. To affirm human sovereignty is his way of counteracting this view. His identification of the divine image with the capacity to rule therefore is, like for Gregory, conditioned by circumstance.

The repeated statement about the divine image as a capacity to rule over, command, or control the animals is not the only way John attempts to thwart the criticism. He suggests an indirect way of confirming it by addressing certain ramifications of sin. As he iterates in *Genesis* 9.10, while human rule over the world is a divine given, sin disturbs the order of things. It is sin that causes the loss of “esteem and authority”¹¹¹ for humans, leading in turn to their fear of the animals. This also is a perennial topic of ascetic literature.¹¹² Furthermore, through a kind of reciprocity, as sin means disobedience to God, the animals

107 κατὰ τὴν τῆς μορφῆς εἰκόνα and κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς λόγον (*Genesis* 9.7.8.2–7). Theodoret found inspiration in John’s teaching. See Theodoret, *Questions* 20.44–50. In what follows I shall point out, when necessary, what did Theodoret add to his master’s teaching.

108 πάντων τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἄρχοντα (*Genesis* 8.7.2.58).

109 For notes on this passage, see Dunning, “Chrysostom’s Serpent,” 79.

110 *Genesis* 10.8.5.53–55.

111 *Genesis* 9.7.9.26. Dunning, “Chrysostom’s Serpent,” 80–81. See Lai, “The *Imago Dei*,” 401.

112 Costache, “Adam’s Holiness,” 339–340; “John Moschus,” 28–31. Robert M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999), 17–19, 20, 167. Theodoret adopts the same view, very possibly borrowing from John. The lions did not touch prophet Daniel in

rebel against humankind (*Genesis* 9.8).¹¹³ This perspective echoes Theophilus' *tantum quantum* principle¹¹⁴ mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Animals obey the people as long as people remain obedient to God, but they disobey them when people disobey God. (Walter Markowicz has shown that Augustine borrowed from John this stance.¹¹⁵ Theodoret, his disciple, did the same.¹¹⁶) Human conduct therefore has an impact on the cosmic environment, especially on animal conduct. But, again borrowing from Theophilus,¹¹⁷ the human loss of command is not total and definitive; nor is the disobedience of the animals. Out of kindness, we read in *Genesis* 9.11, God maintains in subjection to humankind the more serviceable animals, while allowing others to manifest their opposition to the fallen humanity. What matters is the anthropic significance of John's negative account—the fact that human behaviour has an impact on some parts of the creation.

This approach is not without problems. By stating that human sin engenders the wildness of many animals, John contradicts the views he espouses in *On the Providence of God*. Christopher Hall aptly noted that, following the narrative of creation John states there that God made from the outset wild and tame animals.¹¹⁸ The tension is only on the surface. Corresponding to *On the Providence of God*, as we read in *Genesis* 10.12 God made "very good" tame and wild animals, and also helpful and dangerous phenomena. It is this balance in nature that is "good,"¹¹⁹ despite ambiguities.¹²⁰ John could have borrowed this convic-

the pit due to seeing in him "the deiform mark of the divine image" (*Questions* 18.17–18). Thus, "we fear the wild beasts because we do not practise the virtues" (*Questions* 18.22–23).

113 The text reads: "by way of the disobedience of sin" (*Genesis* 10.84.42).

114 For Theophilus, the animals "disobeyed together with the disobedient human being" (*To Autolycus* 2.17.14–23).

115 See Markowicz, "Chrysostom's Sermons," 652–653, quoting Augustine's *Contra Iulianum Pelagianum* 1.25 (*PL* 44, 657).

116 *Questions* 18.67–69.

117 "Similarly, should the human being revert to its natural state (τὸ κατὰ φύσιν) of not doing evil, (the animals) will be restored to their original gentleness (εἰς τὴν ἀρχῇθεν ἡμερότητα)" (*To Autolycus* 2.17.14–23). This nuance was not lost on Theodoret (*Questions* 18.69–72).

118 Hall pointed out that in *On the Providence of God* John states realistically that God's creation contains light and darkness, wild and tamed animals from the outset. "Nature in its pre-Fall state demonstrates a wildness that God considers good, an untamed face that can be dangerous." Christopher A. Hall, "Nature Wild & Tame in St. John Chrysostom's *On the Providence of God*," in *Ancient & Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century—Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 23–37, esp. 31–32.

119 Hall, "Nature Wild & Tame," 29.

120 One such ambiguity regards the serpent. See Dunning, "Chrysostom's Serpent," 71–95.

tion from Basil's similar position.¹²¹ Either way, his two works agree that God made the wild animals so, before humankind's disobedience. There remains therefore a contradiction between *Genesis* 10.12, which takes the wild side of the creation as divinely given, and *Genesis* 9.8 and 9.11, where it is sin which diminishes the human rule over the wild parts of the animal kingdom.

John did not notice this tension or chose not to advert to it. But he could have very well considered the two positions consistent. It is not difficult to see the logic of it: the natural wildness of certain animals becomes dangerous and uncontrolled by humankind because of our sin. Wildness is neither naturally threatening nor totally dangerous to human beings. After all, as Rosa Hunt pointed out, *Genesis* abounds in images which prove John's positive appraisal of the world.¹²² Only ignorance makes people suspect that God has not created a "good" world. As we read in *Genesis* 10.13, the people do not grasp the divine intention regarding the things which they deem dangerous, much the way they ignore the existence of a balance in nature. Hall commented that by reporting on people's ignorance John suggests a way of understanding how the wild aspects of nature can be good. Natural phenomena, animals, and plants wrongly dubbed useless or dangerous are nevertheless useful and good within the divine layout of the creation.¹²³ Either way, John keeps deploying the anthropic stance that the whole of nature was created for humankind.

His admirer, Theodoret, approaches this topic from a slightly different angle, sharing with John the view that the creation is useful to human beings. *Genesis* repeats the divine assessment of the creation as "good" in order to prevent "the ungrateful" from doubting the value of the world.¹²⁴ A little later, he dismisses the possibility of useless plants by showing that some of the inedible ones are food for certain animals and that the latter are useful to human beings in many ways, from food to clothing to work. Thus, indirectly all plants are useful to humankind. Other plants are useful for medicinal purposes.¹²⁵ Regardless of how plants prove to be useful, directly or indirectly, they serve our race. He argues similarly for the usefulness of wild animals, whose various parts are employed for obtaining healing substances.¹²⁶ True, nature is ambivalent: there are elements such as water and fire that do good to humankind, but also cause

121 *Hexaemeron* 5.8.15–16.

122 Hunt, "Reading *Genesis*," 25–30 (creation as teacher, work of art, and act of love).

123 Hall, "Nature Wild & Tame," 32. Nicolaidis, *Science and Eastern Orthodoxy*, 26.

124 Theodoret, *Questions* 10.

125 Theodoret, *Questions* 13.

126 Theodoret, *Questions* 18.36–38.

it great damage. Nevertheless, all things are ultimately useful within creation's overall functionality.¹²⁷ The anthropic principle is satisfied. We recognise many of the positions John advocates; Theodoret developed his teacher's insights according to his own perceptions, knowledge, and interests.

It is against this backdrop that the analogy of the king and the palace comes into play. But before I turn to the relevant passages, consideration should be given to its anthropic setting.

2.3 *Anthropic Perspectives*

Human sovereignty and its exercise as overlordship or control are possible given humankind's configuration in the image of God. They are furthermore facilitated by creation's divine blueprint, particularly the anthropic conditioning of the earth's ecosystem and of the universe in its entirety. Joining the chorus of Basil and Gregory, John repeatedly affirms that God made the earth and the wide cosmic array for the benefit of humankind. For example, in *Genesis* 9.4 he states, lyrically, that the earth—

Has become mother and nurse for us (μήτηρ καὶ τροφός). It is from it that we receive food (τρεφόμεθα) and find enjoyment (ἀπολαύομεν) in all other things. To it we shall return, since for us it is both homeland and tomb (πατρίς καὶ τάφος).¹²⁸

More along the lines of Gregory's position than Basil's, he represents humankind as profoundly intimate with the earth and all that it contains, from the geographical features of the ecosystem to the biosphere. Gregory, we already know, depicts the universe as a home. Similarly, John considers the earth humanity's womb and tomb—the two extremities of our experience in the here and now—thus showing that nothing on earth is foreign, pointless, or evil. The creation is there for humanity's use and enjoyment (see τρεφόμεθα, ἀπολαύομεν). The sense of communion with the earthly environment is the dominant note of the sentence, signified by the phrases “mother and nurse” (μήτηρ καὶ τροφός) and “homeland and tomb” (πατρίς καὶ τάφος). Yet a deeper message can be discerned, too. Since the world is designed as our abode, made for us, it has anthropic features. This conclusion becomes even more obvious in a passage from *Genesis* 8.4, which incidentally connects the anthropic condition of

¹²⁷ Theodoret, *Questions* 18.52–66.

¹²⁸ *Genesis* 9.77.26–30. This sense of communion with the natural environment, understood as a participatory act, corresponds to the overall perception of many past traditional cultures. See Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 4–5.

nature and the hierarchical status of humankind, its uniqueness within the earth's milieu and the cosmos at large. In his words,

The human being is of greater honour (τιμιώτερον πάντων) than all the other living beings we see. On its account all these (other beings) have been brought about (δι' ὃν καὶ ταῦτα ἅπαντα παρήχθη): sky, earth, the sea, the sun, the moon, the stars, the reptiles, domestic animals, and all the unreasoning animals.¹²⁹

The passage summarises the entire universe, which includes life, or is alive and animated. The phrase “all the other living beings we see” and the ensuing list of beings that belong in this category echo Gregory's different kinds of soul recapitulated within the human being.¹³⁰ Apart from John's seemingly animist position—possibly denoting the dynamism of the creation—he introduces two important ideas here. First, the reference to the human being as “of greater honour than all” (τιμιώτερον πάντων) the other existents affirms the superiority of our race to the universe. Addressing the theme of humankind's sovereignty and lending it even more force, the assertion corresponds to Gregory's hierarchical schema.¹³¹ Second, the point that for the human being “all these (other creations) have been brought about” (δι' ὃν καὶ ταῦτα ἅπαντα παρήχθη) denotes that the universe exists *for* humankind.¹³² John shares these convictions with Gregory¹³³ and with his own Antiochene colleague, Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹³⁴ But in Chapter One we discovered a similar position in *Diognetus*.¹³⁵ If perhaps in a weak sense, John's second assertion nevertheless signifies creation's teleological and anthropic nature. The two ideas stated here recapitulate all that we have discovered so far in his Genesis homilies. Humankind ranks the highest within the order of things created, and the cosmos is meant to serve the exis-

129 *Genesis* 8.71.15–19. For a summary of the form of his cosmos in *Genesis*, see Nicolaidis, *Science and Eastern Orthodoxy*, 25–26.

130 *Constitution* 8.145.31–33.

131 See my notes above on *Constitution* 16.180.8–15.

132 Hall (“Nature Wild & Tame,” 35–36) noted that this conviction is ubiquitous in John's writings.

133 See my notes above on *Constitution* 8.144.36–49.

134 Nellas referred to Theodore's *On Genesis* 20, where he quoted the thoughts of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the same analogy (see *PG* 80, 109B). Here is the relevant passage: “Last in order, He brought forth man in His own image, as if the whole of creation were to appear to have been put together for the use of man.” Quoted in Nellas, *Deification*, 26 n. 21.

135 *Diognetus* 10.2.

tence of our race.¹³⁶ Also, by mentioning wild and domesticated animals, the passage brings to clarity his views of the extent of human rule.

Right after the above passage, in *Genesis* 8.5 John refutes the objection that humankind's late arrival excludes its dignity.¹³⁷ It is at this juncture that he introduces his version of the analogy of the king, the palace, and the city, where he also includes the scene of a procession. Here is the text:

Think of a king who is about to enter a city. Guards bearing spears and all the other (courtiers) precede him, as it should, to prepare the royal palace (for his arrival). Only then (sc. when all is ready) does the king (βασιλεύς) approach the royal precincts (βασίλεια). In our case, likewise, (God) established the whole order (διακόσμησιν; of the universe) before this king and ruler of ours (καθάπερ βασιλέα τινά καὶ ἄρχοντα; sc. the human being) was about to be installed (as master of) the entire earth. Then only (sc. after the making of the cosmos) was the established (overlord) meant to be introduced. These things make known to us how honoured this (last created) animal is (ὅσον τιμᾶται τοῦτὶ τὸ ζῶον).¹³⁸

John liberally uses the accounts of Philo and Gregory, without mentioning their contributions. He abridges the narrative of creation in Gen 1, indeed its very sequence, by comparing the making of the universe to a royal procession. In so doing, he reiterates the idea of humankind as the crown of the entire work of creation, and as the appointed ruler of the universe. According to Robert Hill's note on another passage, the human being resembles a deputy deity entrusted with a responsibility for God's creation.¹³⁹ John does not use this terminology, but he shows elsewhere, in *Genesis* 14.9, that Scripture refers to this responsibility in terms of tilling the garden, watching over it, and revering God, the master of all. Understood in this way, the analogy of the king, the procession, and the

136 This conclusion overlaps with the message of *On the Providence of God*. See Hall, "Nature Wild & Tame," 31–33.

137 *Genesis* 8.71.19–20. Echoes from Philo's *Creation* 77–88 and Gregory's *Constitution* 2.132.37–133.33 are discernible here.

138 *Genesis* 8.71.21–29. Theodoret (*Questions*, 20.29–37) simplifies this representation, without the royal imagery. He appears to combine John's anthropic procession of the universe with Gregory the Theologian's (*Oration* 38.11) converging aspects of the creation within the human microcosm. However, Gregory speaks of the noetic, not angelic, aspect of the creation. The terms noetic and angelic are missing from John, who primarily refers to the visible cosmos.

139 Cf. *Homilies on Genesis*, 110 n. 13. See also Hill's comment on Theodoret, *Questions* 20 at 53 n. 5.

palace agrees with the general schema of homilies 8–10 and the construct of the divine image as referring to sovereignty.¹⁴⁰

But there is more. The royal analogy suggests a universe conditioned to facilitate human flourishing,¹⁴¹ a task which the whole of the creation fulfils in subjection to our race. The serviceability of the universe does not presuppose however a divinely sanctioned, ruthless human tyranny over the world. Harrison observed that the Book of Genesis does not support its modern interpretation in anthropocentric terms. He also pointed out that John and other early Christian theologians do not assert—either in the name of Genesis or otherwise—any selfish rights of humankind to take advantage of the world.¹⁴² Indeed, the early Christian thinkers never encourage a view similar to George Orwell's point that the human being serves the interests of no creature except itself.¹⁴³ One should consider John's stances on human royalty together, in the light of those passages where he presents sovereignty as the ascetically achieved virtue of gentleness. He speaks of humankind's natural sovereignty within a divinely ordered universe, not of the contrived sovereignty of a fallen humankind.¹⁴⁴

Corresponding to the previously analysed excerpt, from *Genesis* 9.4, the universe is here an abode, and since its principal inhabitant is a king (see βασιλεύς, καθάπερ βασιλέα τινά καὶ ἄρχοντα), the home is also royal (see βασίλεια), much like a city in which the royal palace is built. Granted, the sense of commonality between humanity and the earth, found in *Genesis* 9.4, fades within the analogy under consideration. But the analogy suggests a respectful perception of

140 *Genesis* 8.4; 8.9; 9.6; 9.8; 10.9.

141 According to Hall ("Nature Wild & Tame," 32) throughout *Genesis* John refers to holistic flourishing. In his words, "God has created the world that is most appropriate for the spiritual and material well-being of humanity." He returned to this matter at 33, but in relation to another work, *Homilies on the Statues* 10. In his words, "Creation's goodness then is a functional goodness, one that reflects God's infinite love for humanity and God's desire to create an environment purposely designed to nurture a human being's awareness of and love for God. The natural world is given to humanity as a gift, filled with grace, in the sense that it is the ideal natural environment for human beings as created in the image of God to grow, develop and exercise the responsibilities given to them by God." The same assessment is applicable to *Genesis*.

142 Harrison, "Having Dominion," 18–20. This point corrects the accepted view that affirming human uniqueness amounts to supporting the selfish use of the environment—an understanding present even in the thought of scholars who oppose the legitimacy of this assumption. See for example Perl, "The Analogy of Personhood," 146.

143 George Orwell, *Animal Farm, Burmese Days, A Clergyman's Daughter, Coming Up for Air, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg/Octopus, 1976), 15.

144 Pagels, "Politics," 70–71.

the world nonetheless. It likens the world to a royal palace and a capital city in which the royal retinue—"sky, earth, the sea, the sun, the moon, the stars, the reptiles, domestic animals, and all the unreasoning animals" of *Genesis* 8.4—shares in the dignity of the ruler, albeit in varying degrees. The honour due to the last created animal (see ὅσον τιμάται τοῦτὶ τὸ ζῶον) in the royal analogy extends to all. This being might be a king, but it participates in the earth's biosphere as any other animals are. As such, the royal status of this being becomes the status of all of the kingdom's inhabitants. By and large, John's view of the situation matches perceptions pertaining to contemporary environmental history.¹⁴⁵ Even though the image of a royal procession towards the palace alludes to a hierarchical structure of the kingdom—God's creation—it does so without listing things in their comparative importance. Since the world is a royal palace and a capital city, everything within it has at least potentially royal status. Think of the inhabitants of a great metropolis compared to the dwellers of rural areas: for rural people, the glamour of the city extends to its residents. The same can be said of Gregory's corresponding analogy, which, we have seen, includes together with the king and his palace the royal domain or the kingdom. But John's image of a royal procession unpacks the notion of a hierarchically ordered universe and of the entire creation on its way towards the palace and, one can assume, the royal status. This is not the only time John deploys this imagery to designate the universe as entirely royal. In his *Homilies on Matthew*, he states against a similar backdrop that "the city is eminently royal and distinguished; it is not divided into the marketplace and the royal court as our cities are; it is royal in its entirety (πάντα βασιλεία)."¹⁴⁶

To summarise, John construed the divine image as sovereignty. While at times sovereignty meant for him moderation, self-control, mildness, and gentleness, generally he discussed human dignity as rule over God's creation. These meanings intersect. Even when the link between them is not entirely obvious—such as in the royal analogy—still the context suggests it. In this light, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled is enriched with endearing nuances, such as acknowledging the earth as mother, nurse, and tomb for the human race.

Nevertheless, the universe and the earth's ecosystem are not entirely comprehensible to humankind. Phenomena unfold all around them which people

145 Griffiths, "Ecology and Empire," 12; "Environmental History, Australian Style," *AHS* 46:2 (2015): 157–173. See also the contributions to the special issue of *RCC Perspectives* (2014:1): *The Edges of Environmental History: Honouring Jane Carruthers*, ed. Christof Mauch and Libby Robin.

146 *Homilies on Matthew* 1 (PG 57, 24.21–24).

do not grasp. Some phenomena possess destructive force; wildlife remains outside human control; sometimes, nature affects human life and habitation in ways which people resent. But the existence of unexplained and uncontrolled phenomena does not challenge God's goodness, the meaningfulness and the welcoming aspect of the world, or humankind's sovereignty over the creation. What people construe as dangerous are misunderstood aspects of the natural world. Such phenomena are equally meant to serve, though in various ways, our being and flourishing. All things have a usefulness and a purpose. From a different angle, the existence of wild, untamed species on earth is largely an outcome of human disobedience, since things in nature—particularly animals—are affected by human misconduct. If the people progress in gentleness and the understanding of nature, more and more of the creation could become tamed for the royal rule of humanity. To a modern reader this resonates with the anthropic condition of the universe.

The analogy of the king, the procession, the palace, and the city encompasses most of the above considerations. Even though it has a narrower purpose—to explain why humankind was created after the other beings—its basis is an anthropic worldview. Its significance therefore transcends John's immediate concerns. The analogy affirms the unity of created nature as a kingly palace and a capital city meant to accommodate the entire royal procession, that is, everything within the universe, including the human race. The universe is a royal home to all things. The royal analogy and the worldview it spells out are not the scenario satirised in Orwell's *Animal Farm* with its competing parties savagely endeavouring to defeat each other. They illustrate the ideal situation which Lewis contemplated in the image of the Great Dance, that all things are in the centre and centres themselves.¹⁴⁷ In terms of contemporary game theory, the inhabitants of John's universe are engaged in a non-zero-sum game,¹⁴⁸ where all are either winners or losers.

Is this an anthropic vista of reality? Definitely, yes. But what kind of anthropic thinking did John observe? I would contend that his worldview satisfies the criteria of the weak principle, which affirms a connection between humankind and the cosmos. Nevertheless, his view of human overlordship

147 Lewis, *Perelandra* (ch. 17), 335–336.

148 See Robert Wright, *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 5, 252–257. The inclusive logic of cooperation has recently become a hot topic, counterbalancing the established selfish and individualistic paradigm. See the essays collected in *Evolution, Games, and God* and Sarah Coakley's Gifford Lectures (2012), available at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/events/gifford-lectures/sarah-coakley-524.php> (accessed 15 August 2019).

which could affect creation positively—insofar as it makes the whole of the creation a royal palace—and negatively—in stirring the wildness of certain animals and natural phenomena—suggests a modified version of the final anthropic principle. But it is not only by way of technology that humankind transforms the universe.¹⁴⁹ Humankind achieves that goal by the spin, to use a quantum metaphor, or the quality of its presence in the world. A disobedient humanity, denoting an inner universe of confusion and disarray, stirs some wildlife to an even greater savagery. In turn, an ascetically pacified humankind contributes to making the universe a structured, meaningful, and worthwhile royal abode—much the way the Christians of *Diognetus* give life to the world which they inhabit as the soul does its body.

3 Conclusions

The early Christian authors whose contributions have been reviewed above, particularly Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom, but also Theophilus of Antioch, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nemesis of Emesa, and Theodoret of Cyrus, shared with Philo a perception of God's creation as both homogenous and hierarchically organised. They asserted an ontological continuity between human nature and the other strands of being, be they animal, vegetal, or mineral; a solidarity between humankind and the cosmic home seen as maternal womb, shelter, and tomb; and a reciprocity between human and animal conduct. To paraphrase Bradbury, all these authors “knew how to live with nature and get along with nature.”¹⁵⁰ At the same time, they consistently operated within a hierarchical framework where solidarity, functionality, and cooperation do not rule out structure and axiology. They represented the sovereign humanity as the high point of God's creation, made in God's image and likeness to rule over the creation. They did not associate human royalty however with a right to exploit the animals, the earth's ecosystem, and the cosmos. Humanity is supposed to rule in harmony with all the other parts of God's creation, which share in its royal status. Contrary to the universe narrated by Orwell, this is not a case of hypocritical egalitarianism misused for oligarchic purposes through

149 Theodoret, in turn, praises human creativity, including manufacturing, as part and parcel of resembling God. In his words, ἀλλὰ καὶ οὕτω δημιουργῶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος, μιμεῖται ἀμὴ γέ πη τὸν ποιητὴν, ὡς εἰκὼν τὸ ἀρχέτυπον (“even by creating in this fashion (out of other things and with toil), the human being imitates the creator to some extent, like an image its archetype”; *Questions* 20.66–77).

150 Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 86.

acquisition of power.¹⁵¹ Corresponding to the Disciple's cosmic agency of Christians, human sovereignty and overlordship represent external manifestations of inner achievements such as serenity, moderation, and dispassion. Virtue, therefore, is the true measure of human dignity and the most constructive factor at work within the ecosystem. There is no room left for anthropocentrism in this worldview.

All these indicate an ecological awareness, a cosmic mindset akin to the contemporary Big History narrative and which antedates by many centuries the recent concept of environmental history. Furthermore, although the qualitative approaches of the authors considered above might not withstand the quantitative scale of the scientific method, in many ways their positions anticipate aspects of the anthropic cosmological principle. They all pointed out the ontological solidarity between humankind and the universe, the structure of nature conditioned to support and nurture the existence of our species, and the impact of human presence and activity upon living things, the earthly ecosystem, and the cosmos. These demonstrate the nuanced and comprehensive character of the Christian worldview, which, theologically grounded, gives a solid articulation to the human and cosmic continuum. From this viewpoint, it is clear that the early Christian worldview is foreign to the modern division of anthropology and cosmology—a division largely responsible for anthropocentrism and its outcome, the senseless exploitation of nature. The contributions of Gregory, John, and their traditional confrères crown the process which *Diognetus* illustrated several generations earlier, articulating a worldview that makes sense for Christians and that elucidates the puzzle of their place in the world.

151 See the famous slogan: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others" (*Animal Farm*, 63), which corresponds to the fictional underground manifesto bearing the implausible title, "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 853).

Yesterday's Lessons for Today

In the introduction to this book I have shown, playfully, that the world of the early Christians—by which I mean both their view of reality and how they inhabited the earth—goes largely unnoticed in the scholarship of the early Christian world. The study of topics such as cosmology and contemplation of the natural world, accordingly, “is not a well-rewarded niche in the corridors of learning,” to paraphrase Asimov again.¹ Hence the scantiness of relevant studies. Throughout this book we have seen that there are several important exceptions to this trend. Together with the present study, these exceptions are but heralds of a revolutionary way of considering things which is yet to come. And until scholars learn to consider the cosmos and its varied populations—human and otherwise—through a multifocal lens, their grasp of the early Christian world will remain incomplete. In turn, such an approach could lead to much more than a better understanding of the past. It could provide us with ideas that are valuable, relevant to our immediate needs and purposes. Being disconnected from nature, our civilisation of technological might, economical rationale, and leisurely pursuits—the brave new world—has critically wounded the earth's ecosphere. And the brave new world is unable to heal the earth. Yet heal the earth it must. But how can the early Christian worldview be of help in this regard, over the gulfs of history? A brief comparison of outlooks will point us to the answer.

From the second to the fifth century, Christians produced a holistic, detailed, and polychrome picture of the cosmos in which they lived. This comprehensive depiction emerged by considering reality through the lens of Scripture, their ecclesiastical, liturgical, and spiritual experience—sometimes in conversation with other religious traditions—and also through the available sciences, philosophy, art, and literature. Against this broad cultural backdrop, they developed a worldview which considers humankind's own place within the earthly environment and the ordered universe. This worldview is a genuine anthropic cosmology, which affirms people's belonging with God's creation and their sense of solidarity with it, for better or worse. The early Christian experience therefore pertains to Big History and to environmental history; narrow disciplinary approaches cannot account for its length, width, and depth. So per-

1 Isaac Asimov, *Foundation and Earth* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1996), 140–141.

ceived, the world is complex. And so are, too, people's interactions with it. It is in the light of this holistic representation of reality that the early Christians assessed their own activities, tasks, and aspirations. As for us, modern people, while we describe reality better than they did, we lost their aptitude to see through things and to grasp their connections. For us, matters of cosmology and anthropology, economy and ecology, do not sit well together. The infinite spaces of the universe, the earthly ecosphere, and the mysteries of life are the province of science; for the rest of us it's business as usual, regardless of the impact of our ignorance and greed. On several occasions throughout this book I have shown that compartmentalisation and overspecialisation are our main weaknesses, indeed our enemies. These features of our culture prevent us from realising the issues that confront us—and from grasping the early Christian world in its complexity. We must wonder together with Asimov whether we could be truly great mathematicians if mathematics is all we know.² A change of lens is in order, and the stances discussed throughout this study might point us in the right direction. But let us take a closer look at our findings.

The way the early Christians represented reality developed by leaps and shifts of perspective, within the parameters of their own faith convictions. What conditioned their advancement from lacking cosmic focus to a deep interest in the universe are historical and cultural factors. These facilitated their understanding the faith in increasingly more profound ways, including the doctrine of creation. This, in turn, led them to a better grasp of the world. And the more they understood it, the more they appreciated it. They became more and more aware of the divine calling to safeguard the world and to contribute to its flourishing. They realised that they could not live and thrive in a world of which they had no understanding, and also without adopting a corresponding lifestyle, caring for the earth and its many denizens. Indeed, the sources analysed above illustrate this double concern, namely, to grasp reality and humankind's part in it. They also make plain that this goal cannot be achieved without the theological perspective—thus, without being anchored in the transcendent yet omnipresent source of creation's existence and meaningfulness, God.

At the end of this journey, we must ask ourselves what, precisely, have we learnt.

2 Asimov, *Prelude to Foundation*, 93.

1 Piecing Things Together

To an extent, I suspect, this patristic journey may have disappointed the reader. The relevant sources offer only glimpses of the whole, without bothering to collect the tesserae of the puzzle into a coherent picture. What causes this situation has by now become clear, I hope. This is a consequence of the nature of these sources and of authorial intentions. As none of the writings examined here is called *On the Cosmos*, or some such title, the rigorous study of nature falls outside their scope. Despite their rich cosmological contextualisation, they are either apologetic or exegetical or ascetic writings. As such, they consider matters cosmological together with other topics and from viewpoints foreign to the normative study of the universe. The writers themselves were not professional cosmologists. Some of them deliberately ignored—either partially or wholesale—the scientific theories of their times. Some mentioned them critically. Some others, in turn, took for granted cosmology and the broader scientific culture of their age, wasting no further thought on them. No wonder the unabridged early Christian map of the world still eludes us.

More factors, however, were at play. If my analysis is correct, Origen and Evagrius' metaphysical speculations—generally viewed as grand cosmological narratives—are not primarily about the universe. And should their speculations still say something relevant about it, they would do so only indirectly, against the backdrop of very different interests. No reliable map of the world there. We find important information, however, in contexts where they addressed matters physical directly, with or without hermeneutical elements being obvious. But neither these other instances include comprehensive maps of the cosmos nor do they mention topics treated by other authors. For example, the view of the world as melodious barely registers in them, if present at all. In the same vein, Clement—who described the first known method of Christian contemplation and who generously employed musical imagery—had little to say about the shape of the cosmos itself. As did Origen and Evagrius after him, he preferred to discuss methodological aspects. And while their shared interest in methodology suggests continuity within the tradition, we are no less bereft of a map of the world. We cannot find it in other authors either—such as Theophilus, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, and John—who produced partial descriptions of the natural world. For example, Athanasius peered into the flowing nature of things and the significance of order. Basil preferred to look closely at various landscapes and ecosystems, but seeking wisdom lessons. Furthermore, Gregory, while Ptolemaic cosmography appears in the background of his considerations, focused upon the inner workings of nature. Others, moreover, like Ignatius and Irenaeus, contemplated nature seeking to find in it a

mirror of the liturgical experience of the church. We are left only with the tesserae of the mosaic, yes, but we have learnt many things about the early Christian view of the cosmos—especially from the authors who used a multifocal lens which included the available sciences.

We must therefore not be unfair to these authors. The pieces of the mosaic are as important as the mosaic itself. These give us a sense of how the early Christian mind functioned in matters of representing reality. And the many tesserae are not so difficult to piece together. To that end, however, our task to understand and to arrange the scattered data into a coherent worldview is indispensable. Taking my cue from the ideas and the terms discussed throughout this study, I propose the following summary of the early Christian representation of reality.

The ordered universe exists due to God's will who creates, supports, and guides it towards the final consummation—the perfect fellowship of God, humankind, and the cosmos. The entire project advances according to a blueprint designed by the creator Logos when the world was not. However, advancement depends on multiple factors, divine, cosmic, and human, not merely supernatural ones.

The creator differs from the creation ontologically, but is actively present in it. As such, the creator contributes to the processes put in place for the cosmos to be, to move, and to reach fulfilment. But these supernaturally fuelled processes are no less natural, presupposing physical forces which belong to the universe itself. Indeed, these physical forces exist from the outset, from the ineffable instant of creation's beginning. They first became manifest when God's energy activated the darkness—or the chaos of created matter—as light. Light is the name of a natural energy which structures the chaos into universe, or the name of the chaos on its way to becoming cosmos. The chaos has from the beginning the potentiality of light; it contains the promise to become the ordered universe. And the chaos will continue to be potentiality, though less and less, until all that once was latent is activated—or until darkness will be no more.

Activation entails supernatural and natural factors. As the divine call, nudge, or energy woke up nature's potential in the beginning, so God continues to do throughout the universe's course, fuelling its natural movement. Cosmic existence is an ongoing exercise in synergy. Nature itself constitutes an open field where the uncreated and the created realities interact. This fundamental process corresponds to the concrete objects which emerge at the intersection of material and immaterial factors—or where the divine blueprint takes material existence or flesh, so to speak. Synergy exists on all levels of nature, from the elements to the processes at work in the earthly ecosphere to celestial mechan-

ics to the universe in its entirety. Nature is neither purely material nor divine. Nature is complex. The universe's movement itself is natural and supernatural, random yet purposeful.

What secures purposefulness is the universe's antecedent blueprint, which sets the parameters for all things to exist, to move, and to have their being. Phenomena emerge due to infrastructural mathematical patterns—divine numbers and measures—which enable organisation and complexity. As divine conditions frame the universe's movement in the form of laws, the dynamism, randomness, and spontaneity of nature lead to increasing complexity, not to further chaos. The outcome is our ordered universe. Chaos become cosmos.

Order and complexity are also expressed through images, signs, and symbols. The cosmos is theologically meaningful, revealing God's activity, will, and wisdom which permeate all things. It does so by interpreting the foundational symphony or ode written by the divine Logos from before the ages. For the multilayered cosmos is also a polyphonic instrument, an orchestra, and a chorus. While its music is not consistently harmonious, salvation restores its beauty. Salvation is the restoration of the cosmic music disturbed by the cacophony of human ungodly activities. Restoration is possible given that the agent of salvation, Jesus Christ, is the Logos incarnate, the agent of creation and providence. As such, Christ's salvation both leads humankind back on track and attunes the cosmic processes to the blueprint of the creation. And so the advancement of both humankind and the cosmos towards their shared goal—eschatological perfection—becomes possible again.

In order to grasp the sense of the cosmic song, however, believers must learn to consider the universe through a different lens. Indeed, its theological meaningfulness does not transpire only as sacred music; it also is a scriptural narrative of sorts, or a theological book. It is Scripture itself which makes obvious the cosmic narrative by referring to it as such. For it shows that the universe teaches wisdom, which believers—in awe—must learn how to read. As with Scripture itself, this requires hermeneutical decoding. In principle, the message of the cosmic book corresponds with Scripture's own discourse. They both reveal God's plan for a creation whose fulfilment largely depends on the "spin" of human activity.

Given its theological meaningfulness the universe is, furthermore, a school. In the cosmic school able and diligent students learn about the creator, the universe, and their own place in the order of things. This they do through contemplative exercises. They learn to understand the cosmos as God's creation and to love it and all its parts. Understanding leads to love because it shows that the world is meant to be their home. This realisation brings with it a sense of responsibility for their own wellbeing and for the flourishing of their home,

part and whole. The cosmic school teaches that they must protect and till the garden. To perform this task, however, they undertake personal transformation through ascesis and advance in divine knowledge. For without the caretakers adopting a corresponding lifestyle, the earthly ecosystem and the universe in its entirety will not reach the divinely set goal.

This synthesis might not account for everything we discovered above, but I hope that it still gives us a fair idea of how the early Christians viewed the world and their place in it.

2 Understanding What We Learnt

The above reconstruction confirms that the early Christians worked within the framework of a theory or a narrative of everything, although they did not present it as such. This is to say, furthermore, that their analysed contributions anticipate contemporary concepts and approaches such as anthropic cosmology, Big History, and environmental history. Whatever we call it, the early Christian worldview is holistic in its outlook, encompassing anthropological, biological, cosmological, environmental, and theological dimensions.

One might object that my synthesis is not equally applicable to the cases discussed in this book. To an extent, this is true. The sketchy cosmography of *Diognetus* is not Gregory of Nyssa's chaos theory. Nor does Ignatius' choral starfield match the complexity of Basil's attention to natural phenomena. But one should not forget that—within the relevant timeframe, from the second to the fifth century—the early Christian worldview continued to evolve. Some of the contributions treated above illustrate the earlier reluctance of Christians towards all things worldly. Others display the more relaxed attitude of the Nicene appreciation for the cosmos taken as a central topic of the faith. Their respective contexts prescribed the amount of attention these writers were to give to the universe. Other differences refer to intellectual sophistication and scientific literacy. Obviously, certain authors were more educated than others. Yet other differences stem from the genre of these writings and from authorial intentions. One cannot expect an exegetical homily to introduce matters of the Christian worldview in the manner of an apologetic treatise.

But what lends credence to my reconstruction is that these sources also have very important elements in common. They represent the mainstream Christian Hellenistic tradition and, overall, consider reality through a contemplative lens. They uphold the same scripturally anchored doctrine of creation, which they address within the scientific culture of late antiquity. From their perception of the universe they draw practical wisdom to guide everyday life. This, precisely,

is why their specific contributions converge into a comprehensive, consistent, and coherent representation of reality.

To draw this study to a close, three particulars deserve further attention: the cosmological framing of theological anthropology and its environmental implications; the interdisciplinary approach; and the sense of cosmic wonder. From my viewpoint, these particulars represent the most important contributions of the sources analysed here, providing contemporary scholars with indispensable tools for a better understanding of the early Christian world. They also convey significant lessons for today.

The cosmological and environmental framing of theological anthropology is inherent to the early Christian worldview. In what follows, I shall render this idea in terms which resonate with contemporary perceptions and concerns. Most sources considered above subscribe to the view that—while being created in God's image and theologically conditioned—humankind is inextricably connected with the planetary ecosphere and the cosmos in its entirety. Human nature shares ontological solidarity with the created universe, including the earth's biosphere. This nexus bears profound implications. The world is divinely purposed as humankind's cradle. All things are useful for us human beings. All of the universe's components conspire in our favour. This realisation occasions wonderment to the cosmologists who consider "the goldilocks enigma" as much as it did to the early Christians who were contemplating the world's wise design. Viewed from the other end, all this amounts to saying that human nature, as a microcosm which summarises within itself all of reality, imposes anthropic restrictions upon the universe. The cosmos and the earthly ecosphere are as they are because we live here. The universe is not a hostile place, despite its violent rhythms and the catastrophes it continuously experiences. As we are still here, the accidents that occur make our existence possible. Under God's providence and within an ordered universe, indeed, all events tend to turn out well. In the grand schema of things, all beings are there for the good of other beings, and all secure human existence. To grasp this situation, people must discover the melodious rationality which traverses all the levels of reality, including areas of turbulence and disharmony. After all, people are the thinking centre where cosmic order and meaningfulness register and are processed.

It is against this backdrop that we contemplate humankind's ecological and, indeed, cosmic responsibility. Attuned to God's wisdom—the creator of both humankind and the world—and aware of their place in the order of things, people must live accordingly. That is, they must adopt an ascetic lifestyle and a moderate use of the world. It is only through asceticism that they change from exploiters into gentle stewards. Asceticism, furthermore, transforms them from

within. As the positive energies of transformed persons reverberate far and wide, this lifestyle does not require a *modus operandi* similar to contemporary environmental action. Their immanence itself constitutes a kind of mystical agency working towards the world's wellbeing. But this mystical agency does not exclude a corresponding environmental activity; on the contrary, the two aspects complement each other. It is well known that Christian saints, as profoundly transformed people, are compassionate towards the natural world and all its inhabitants, human and otherwise, sentient, sapient, and far from either sapience or sentience. What matters is that—regardless of the numbers of those who attain to holiness—humankind's solidarity with the natural world and contribution to cosmic wellbeing are part and parcel of the early Christian worldview. This stance remains an inspiration over the gulfs of history, especially in times that are as dire as our age is for the natural world.

Another significant aspect of the early Christian worldview is the interdisciplinary approach. The sources analysed in this book demonstrate a complex thinking irreducible to the narrow frame of reference of, say, doctrinal theology. True, all adhere to the same doctrine of creation. But their depiction of the ordered universe as a theologically meaningful and welcoming place draws on multiple disciplinary viewpoints. Succinctly put, they describe reality as the scientific culture of late antiquity did, and interpret it theologically, from the vantage point of a scripturally anchored faith.³ They introduce a universe of fundamental elements and natural energies, of movement, change, and complex order, also one which—being continuously permeated by divine energies—evolves within the parameters of God's wisdom. But there is more to the interdisciplinary approach of these sources. For example, they consider reality through the lens of Christian experience. Accordingly, the universe is an alternate liturgical assembly, which mirrors the rhythms of the church. Cosmic harmony doubles the church's doxologies. The singing choirs of the church correspond to the voices of the elements. The mutual love of believers mirrors the cosmic solidarity of all created beings. Furthermore, from a pedagogical angle, the universe represents a genuine school where people learn about the creator, themselves, and the meaning of all that is. In the same vein, the world and its nonhuman inhabitants inspire ethical behaviour. Behind this pedagogical worldview operates a hermeneutical approach. Through this interpretative lens, the scientifically described, measured, and analysed cosmos becomes an

3 Incidentally, contemporary studies in the history of science and theology—such as Ferngren's *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*—ignore most of the sources I have examined in this book. In the light of my findings, the current view must be revised to accommodate more names and contributions.

object of spiritual interpretation. To grasp its message, together with training and skills, the interpreter undertakes personal purification and seeks fellowship with God who speaks through the universe's harmony.

As it straddles a range of perspectives, from the natural sciences to scriptural wisdom to contemplative insights, the early Christian worldview suggests a superior solution to the widespread opinion in our age—that scientific and theological perspectives are incompatible. It also reveals an important task of contemporary Christians, namely, to replicate the achievements of past generations by redrafting the doctrine of creation in the framework of today's scientific culture.

The last aspect I wish to highlight is the early Christian sense of cosmic wonder. The sources discussed throughout this book display deep reverence for God's wisdom embodied in the created universe. While the universe itself is not the focus of their reverence, these sources nevertheless depict it as theologically meaningful and worthy of respect and awe. Quantitative assessments, economical calculation, and anthropocentric considerations have no say here. Nor do simplistic theological definitions of the creation's mystery that reduce it to having been created *ex nihilo*. That the insights of these early Christian sources into natural phenomena have in time become outmoded is of no consequence. Their contemplative and qualitative approach does not depend upon the ancient sciences—or any other scientific culture for that matter. This is so because these sources do not only describe reality. They marvel at the harmony and beauty of things; the fitness and usefulness of the natural processes; the meaningfulness and the purposefulness of the universe. The world they depict is harmonious and musical; a world full of signs and messages. Their world is a welcoming place where people find shelter and enjoyment, wisdom and enrichment. The aptitude of the early Christians for wonderment led them to an overwhelming experience of cosmic fellowship, of meaning and purposefulness. Their experience is the very opposite of the sense of despair, isolation, and meaninglessness felt by contemporary people, who cannot free their hectic schedules in order to see the eloquent beauty of cosmic order. A return to natural contemplation and the early Christian sense of wonder might improve their situation—especially at the present time, when the pressures of the pandemic add further angst to the sense of pointlessness that so many people experience.

Either way, it is my fervent hope that this exercise in looking at things differently will inspire the reader as much as it did me.

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